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Dementia borealis: the Canadian North in the Verse of Robert W. Service

by

© Peter James Mitham

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1994

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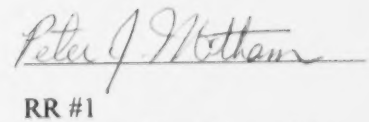

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Abstract

For Robert W. Service, the Canadian North exerts an influence over its inhabitants that they can neither control nor understand. In his first three volumes of verse, *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907), *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909), and *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912), he offers a compelling interpretation of that influence, succinctly expressed in the epigraph to "The Ballad of Pious Pete," which declares "*The North has got him*" (*BC* 39). The northern lights, or *aurora borealis*, are the key element in Pete's madness. Together with the cold, the wilderness, and the promise of adventure, the lights distinguish the North in Service's verse, and contribute to the onset of *dementia borealis*, the madness of the North. In coining *dementia borealis* to define the North's effect on people, the author deliberately echoes the term '*aurora borealis*.'

Throughout his verse, Service's preeminent fascinations are with the environment and its effect on individuals. The purpose of this thesis is to explore Service's representation of the North -- the Canadian environment -- using *dementia borealis* as a touchstone. Service wrote for a popular audience, and the first chapter examines the degree to which Burns and Kipling, among other British, American, and French popular writers, influenced his work. It also considers Service's experience of the periodical press both in Scotland and during his American peregrinations prior to the publication of *Songs of a Sourdough*. The second chapter explores the various manifestations of *dementia borealis* in Service's northern ballads, both in the wilderness and in society, and especially its transformation from a largely hostile malady in his first two volumes to a more benevolent phenomenon in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*. The third chapter considers Service's cultural legacy, both in the work of those who set his verse to music as well as in the original compositions of Canadian songwriters Stompin' Tom Connors and Stan Rogers. The thesis concludes by considering current anthologies of Service's verse that

focus on his northern ballads to the exclusion of the material that he wrote after leaving Canada in 1912.

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Abbreviations:

SS = *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907)

SY = *The Spell of the Yukon* (1907)

BC = *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909)

RRS = *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912)

RRCM = *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916)

BB = *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921)

PM = *Ploughman of the Moon* (1945)

HH = *Harper of Heaven* (1948)

SSL = *Songs of a Sun-Lover* (1949)

LCV = *Later Collected Verse* (1965)

RKV = *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*

Introduction

For Robert W. Service, the Canadian North exerts an influence over its inhabitants that they can neither control nor understand. In his first three volumes of verse, *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907), *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909), and *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912), he offers a compelling interpretation of that influence, succinctly expressed in the epigraph to "The Ballad of Pious Pete," which declares "*The North has got him*" (*BC* 39). In the ballad that follows Pete goes mad when he confronts the peculiar landscape of the northern winter. The northern lights, or *aurora borealis*, are the key element in Pete's madness. They are the presiding spirit of the North. In "The Cremation of Sam McGee" the lights see "queer sights" (*SS* 55), such as the changes that the cold, the wilderness, and the promise of adventure work in people. Together with these three elements, the lights distinguish the North in Service's verse, and contribute to the onset of *dementia borealis*, the madness of the North. Therefore, I have echoed the term '*aurora borealis*' in coining *dementia borealis* to define the North's effect on people.

The frequency with which *dementia borealis* occurs in Service's work establishes it as an integral component of his verse. The North that 'gets' people is larger than the sourdough's Klondike; it is the broad expanse of wilderness north of the sixtieth parallel, the southern border of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Although *Songs of a Sourdough* definitively identified Service with the Yukon and its Klondike gold fields, *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, written following his overland trip to Dawson via the Northwest Territories in 1911, "abandoned the Yukon and . . . concerned the Mackenzie basin and the Arctic" (*PM* 458). Throughout the North, however, travellers risk madness: the region frustrates their plans, or ravishes them with its estival bounty and beauty. The North crushes Pious Pete, who is frustrated at being unable to persuade his partner to embrace Christianity, yet in "The Heart of the Sourdough" it captivates the speaker in a passionate, intense relationship that typifies the other aspect of *dementia borealis*.

Between these two extremes there are several variations. Sam McGee's obsession with the northern cold occasions laughter when his cremation overcomes the environment's power, while in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," the miner's arrival in town to exact vengeance on McGrew indicates the potential of the wilderness to invade the civilized order. In "The Nostomaniac" (*RRS* 56-61), the North diverts the speaker's attention from his luxurious lifestyle with the promise of the freedom and adventure it provided him in his youth.

Service's ballads lend credence to Margaret Atwood's theory that nature assumes the role of monster in Canadian fiction (*Survival* 45). *Dementia borealis* occurs when the environment thwarts human expectations. Earlier Romantic conceptions of nature as either a benevolent mother or a range of sublime scenes succumbed to the realities of Canadian frontier life (*Survival* 49-50). This gap between expectation and reality eventually produced a popular image of Canada as a harsh, northern world. The continuing confrontation that settlers experienced with the frontier in the northwest perpetuated an antagonistic representation of the Canadian environment in literature. Literary depictions of Canada towards the end of the nineteenth century reinforced this perception (*Survival* 50). Gilbert Parker's collection *Pierre and His People: Tales of the Far North* (1897) opens with a story that culminates in the main character freezing to death "but a few miles from [his] barracks ("Cypress Hills" 23). The story emphasizes the danger of the Canadian environment from the start of the book. With greater pertinence to *dementia borealis*, a later story in Parker's collection features "the Tall Master," an evil figure who embodies the mystery of the North and exerts "a weird influence among the Indians" ("Tall Master" 212). "I have found the core of Nature," he declares, "Here in the North is the wonderful soul of things. Beyond this, far beyond, where the foolish think is only inviolate ice, is . . . a very pleasant land" (213). The Master eventually exerts his power over the Indians, enticing them away with the music of his violin. The spirit of the North incarnate, the Master issues an "ineffable Call" that the Natives cannot resist (219).

The North exerts a similar influence in the stories of Jack London, whom Service claims as an influence on his own career (*PM* 102). "When the world rang with the tale of Arctic gold," says the narrator of "In a Far Country" (1899), "the lure of the North gripped the heartstrings of men" (161). For two men so caught, the North inexorably works their destruction. *Dementia borealis* claims them in their attempt to survive the harsh northern winter. "The Fear of the North, . . . the joint child of the Great Cold and the Great Silence," crushes the men, dominating their imaginations and alienating them from one another (169). Eventually, when they can no longer endure the strain of living together in their snow-bound cabin, they kill each other. Such tales had non-fictional counterparts. 'Stroller' White, editor of the Whitehorse *Star* newspaper and a patron of Service, wrote of one friendship that took a turn for the worse on account of the North:

> The winter of '99 shut down, isolating [Tom and Jack] from other miners, and before long they had quarreled. . . . They used the single door in common but otherwise they lived as completely separate lives as though they had been separated by a mile instead of by an invisible partition. Each completely ignored the other while they were in the cabin. . . . they invented a mythical third partner to help out with [the work].

Save for the "mythical third partner," this is the same story that London relates. White, however, has an alternative ending:

> Tom also entered the Monte Carlo, walked directly to Jack, and said: "Have you anything valuable or that you care about in your end of the cabin?"
>
> It took Jack by surprise for a moment but he quickly recovered and asked: "What in hell business is it of yours whether or not I have anything valuable in my end of the cabin?"
>
> "You are perfectly right," said Tom, turning on his heel. "It is none of my business what you have in your end of the cabin. But I thought it only fair to tell you that I set fire to my end of the cabin before I left." (66-67)

Life on the Canadian frontier crushes both the characters of fiction and real people. Service capitalizes on the appeal of this phenomenon in his tales of characters eager for a

rugged, adventurous life that places them at the mercy of the wilderness. "Somehow life's not what I thought it," confesses one sourdough, in a bewildered tone that indicates that he expected to have mastery over the North, rather than vice versa (*SS* 21). The winter surprises Pious Pete, swiftly isolating him from the reality that he formerly knew (*BC* 40-41). The North reorients individuals to itself, destroying the weak who, initially filled with a Romantic confidence in its benevolence, come to vilify it for its actual indifference. Service's characters must "defy and defend" themselves against the North (*SS* 32), but their willingness to adapt determines their survival. The appeal of Service's ballads lies in the spirit with which Sam McGee, Pious Pete, and others take up the challenge that the North presents. The natural world demands confrontation, and *dementia borealis* is the inevitable result of life in the North. Service employs it as the universal response to the North.

Throughout his verse, Service's preeminent fascinations are with the environment and its effect on individuals. In *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916), he records the reactions of individuals to the circumstances of war. In describing the genesis of his battle-front ballads, Service declares, "As I had grabbed my stuff from the Yukon now I would make the War my meat" (*HH* 77). The same spirit flows through both, the narrative being the vehicle for his illustrations of an environment's effects. Like those of his northern ballads, the characters in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* require vibrant spirits and a sense of humour to successfully confront an unyielding environment. The spirit of adventure that motivates the Klondike prospectors also animates the man from Athabaska, who cannot fathom the call that draws him into the First World War:

> "But I haven't missed a scrap," says I, "since I was one and twenty.
> And shall I miss the biggest? You can bet your whiskers -- no!"
> (*RRCM* 25)

Although the setting is different, the soldiers exhibit the same vitality in the face of horror as do the men who endure the severity of the Yukon. The man from Athabaska cannot

resist the call of battle any more than the prospectors could resist the lure of gold. War produces its own dementia.

Service plays with and delights in all the hilarious and macabre possibilities the environment's triumph over an individual affords. "The Haggis of Private McPhee" is a humourous illustration of the madness war causes. Having hoped for a haggis on their return from patrol (it being Burns's birthday), a couple of Scots soldiers are wounded in the line of duty, and to add insult to injury, return to discover that an enemy shell "*drapped on the haggis and dinged it tae hell*" (*RRCM* 39). In consequence, when the order next comes to attack, "there wisna' a man but had death in his ee, / For he thocht o' the haggis o' Private McPhee" (*RRCM* 40). This ferocious response to the enemy attack, fired by the loss of the haggis, parodies the larger political contest. Worn out by the frustration of battle, the men treat their personal loss of the haggis as a national affront. The black humour of the poem is not unlike that of Service's northern ballads such as "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill" (*BC* 45-50). There, the speaker finds his promise to bury Bill stymied by the fact that the corpse is spread-eagled. In his frustration, the speaker decides to approach the matter directly, and saws the corpse apart in order to fit it into its coffin. Despite the gravity of both situations -- battle and interment -- people accomplish their duties in unconventional and bathetic ways. The inspiration of the haggis grotesquely redefines the motives of warfare, just as the speaker in the other ballad sacrifices proper respect for the dead in his determination to fulfill Bill's wishes.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Service's representation of the North -- the Canadian environment -- using *dementia borealis* as a touchstone. Service wrote for a popular audience, and the following chapter outlines the literature and the cultural forces that informed his work. The second chapter examines the various manifestations of *dementia borealis* in Service's northern ballads, especially its transformation from a largely hostile to a more benevolent phenomenon. The third chapter explores Service's cultural

legacy with a view to understanding the fascination sagas of northern survival have for contemporary audiences, as well as his own continued appeal.

I: The Literary Background

Robert Service's autobiography, *Ploughman of the Moon* (1945), details the development of his reading interests and his progress as a writer from his youth through to *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912). He was an avid reader whose interests included Scottish, English, French, and American writers. An early interest in British writers such as Burns and Dickens shaped Service's perception of his environment, and prepared him to read the more philosophical writings of Thoreau and such self-consciously artistic French authors as Zola. His early interest in popular literature is characteristic of this development. Pleasure in reading the "saltiest" of Burns's verse (*PM* 25) eventually gave way to enjoyment of Zola's avant-garde novels of the lower classes. Both authors contributed to the presence of unrefined characters in Service's writing and a philosophy that respects the dignity of those who sometimes succumb under the pressures of their circumstances. The international character of Service's reading introduced him to the world beyond Scotland. George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* inspired a life-long interest in France that culminated in his settlement there in 1913 (*PM* 119), while *The Western Avernus* of Morley Roberts influenced his earlier decision to emigrate to North America (*PM* 120). These influences, which Service absorbed over the course of many years, played an integral role in the development of *Songs of a Sourdough*.

As a young boy, Robert Service lived with his grandfather and several aunts in the town of Kilwinning, Ayrshire (Klinck 5). "Anything that rhymed was poetry" to these relatives. Encouraged to recite "The boy stood on the burning deck" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus" among other pieces, Service acquired a literary foundation in the popular verse of the late Victorian era. Service rapidly developed a keen interest in literature, fed with selections from his school readers. "But always," he says, "I returned to Burns" (*PM* 25). Ayrshire was the land of Robert Burns, and the influence of the older poet dominated Service's early literary experiences. Apart from the simple geographic connection, Service

claims that "there was, in fact, quite a literary tradition in our family. My great-grandfather had been a crony of Robert Burns and claimed him as a second cousin. One of our parlour chairs had often been warmed by the rump of the Bard" (*PM* 15). Service's grandfather and aunts regarded Burns highly, and Service continued the tradition, frequently reiterating that this distant relative was the preeminent poetic influence of his early years. Service composed very little verse as a child, absorbing the influence of Burns through frequent recitation instead. "[His] was the tongue of our town and every word was vital," writes Service. "But I savoured him at his saltiest, and read with gusto about *The Lass that made the bed for me*, and the *Louse in the lady's bonnet*. I preferred humour to sentiment and liked it racy. Already I felt an urge to shock people" (*PM* 25). Though Service's notion of raciness may seem tame to contemporary readers, critics considered his Canadian publisher, William Briggs of Toronto, to have compromised standards of decency in agreeing to print his work: "That [he] should have published the ribald rhymes of Robert W. Service shows how far the policy of [the Methodist Book and Publishing House] had changed" comments one writer (Wallace 3). When Service did begin to write in earnest, it was the manner and medium of Burns's work that affected his style. The medium of verse appealed to Service, as did the sometimes-irreverent humour that Burns employed.

"Poetry attracted me," he says, "largely . . . because of the rhyming" (*PM* 15), and Service's facility for rhyming contributes to the vitality of his Yukon ballads. The internal rhymes in "The Cremation of Sam McGee" propel the ballad forward, and contribute to a humour that, if not racy, is definitely not sentimental. As the poem moves towards its climax, the narrator says, "'I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked,' . . . then the door I opened wide" (*SS* 59). The internal rhyme of "cooked" and "looked" suggests a parallel between Sam and a roast Christmas turkey, a connotation that overcomes the "grisly fear" with which the narrator wrestles (*SS* 59), and intimates the surprisingly festive conclusion that the cremation occasions.

Sam's contentment at the end asserts the dominance of good humour that Service prized in Burns. A similar cheerful spirit and irreverence for the dead appears in "Tam Samson's Elegy" (Burns 239-41). The "Elegy," like "The Cremation," creates a bathetic spirit as it moves towards a humorous end. Burns laments the sportsman Samson's death with appropriate, but unconventional, images:

> Now safe the stately sawmont sail,
> And trouts bedropp'd wi crimson hail,
> And eels, weel-kend for souple tail,
> And geds for greed,
> Since, dark in Death's fish-creel, we wail
> Tam Samson's dead! (Burns 240)

Placing poor Tam in a fish-creel rivals Cap's use of a riverboat's furnace for McGee's crematorium. The reversal that occurs at the end of both poems accords with the ambiguity of the speaker's sorrow and the light-heartedness of the rhymes employed to convey the supposed grief. The narrator's nonchalant desire to look in on Sam is not tinged with concern for the dead; he has already called the corpse a "hateful thing" (*SS* 58). The triumph of humour in both poems links the styles of the two poets, both of whom spurn sentimentality for the sake of a laugh.

The fact that Burns wrote in the Ayrshire dialect used in Kilwinning also contributed to Service's affection for his predecessor. Service acquired a love for the language of Scotland as heard in Kilwinning, and his poetry often makes use of dialect, albeit never consistently. In *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, for example, Service includes several ballads where the speaker is a Scot -- as in "The Haggis of Private McPhee" -- but he never writes in broad Scots. Dialect merely serves to convey the accent or attitude of the speaker (Lockhart 155). Similarly, his North American characters have their own dialect, as "The Little Old Log Cabin" illustrates:

> When a man gits on his uppers in a hard-pan sort of town,
> An' he ain't got nothin' comin', an' he can't afford ter eat,
> An' he's in a fix fer lodgin', an' he wanders up an' down,
> An' you'd fancy he's been boozin', he's so locoed 'bout the feet;

. . . . . .

Then he's apt ter git a-thinkin' an' a-wishin' he was back
In the little ol' log cabin in the shadder of the pines. (*SS* 77)

The expressions and clipped words such as 'locoed' and 'gits on his uppers' reflect an individual who is at home in the backwoods. Dialect places the poem in the popular context of a Canadian rustic's lifestyle, and its appearance in the Victoria *Daily Colonist* and the Whitehorse *Semi-Weekly Star* prior to *Songs of a Sourdough* confirms its appeal to popular audiences. Service bases the speaker's language not only on the models offered in similar newspaper ballads, but also on his observation of such people in British Columbia (*PM* 163). As in the verse of W. H. Drummond, dialect creates a distinct world that removes Service's audience from its own situation, yet allows readers to see themselves from a new perspective. Service's absorption of the speech of Kilwinning gave him a verbal felicity that contributes to his representation of the Yukon and elsewhere in a novel and entertaining manner that captures the imagination of his readers.

When Service was about ten, his parents retrieved him to live with them in Glasgow, a port city and hub of Britain's Victorian empire that broadened his social and cultural horizons. He confesses that, during the next decade, a voracious appetite for literature provided him with his knowledge of the works of Dickens and Stevenson, among others (*PM* 50-51). These popular authors developed his sensitivity to the world about him, and he began to interpret his experiences and the scenes he witnessed in the light of their writing. When he was fourteen, Service entered the employ of a bank in Glasgow as a clerk. He recalls that the most enjoyable aspect of the job was the opportunity it gave him to observe a host of "Dickens-like characters meandering from pub to pub" (*PM* 77). This early interest in people later manifested itself in the several ballads he wrote focussing on individuals, such as "The Ballad of Pious Pete" and "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill." Similarly, Stevenson eventually offered a direction for Service's travels, although no direct parallel appears between their published experiences.

As similar employment would in Canada fifteen years later, Service's bank job provided an environment that stimulated his imagination. He not only observed people in Glasgow, but soon began to write verses modelled on those of Thackeray and Tom Hood. Their verse appealed to him for exactly the same reason as that of Burns did: it rhymed (*PM* 83). In addition to his literary models, he attempted to address contemporary tastes by emulating the poems previously published by the periodicals to which he submitted his own work. As a result, he wrote short pieces that possessed the simple structure of an "attack, build-up and pay-off" (*PM* 88). Writing these early verses taught Service to concentrate the vitality of a poem in order to maximize its appeal. A comic piece that appeared in the Glasgow weekly *Scottish Nights* entitled "It Must Be Done" (*PM* 84) later appeared in a British Columbia paper, and its publication only a few years before the appearance of *Songs of a Sourdough* indicates that he still considered its style worthy of publication. Here it is as it appeared in the *Duncans Enterprise*, 5 December 1903:

He stands alone by the water's edge,
  With pale and anguished brow,
And shudders as he murmurs low;
  "It must be done, and now."

He looks into those icy depths,
  With wildly starting eye;
And from his panting breast there breaks
  A deep and bitter sigh.

Through all his tense and rigid frame
  Great thrills of horror run;
And once again he murmers hoarse:
  "It must and shall be done."

His mind's made up. A long, last look!
  A plunge! and all is o'er.
He's taken -- what was his intent --
  His morning bath -- no more.

Thackeray's "Dear Jack" is a prime example of the type of verse that Service aimed to write when he composed "It Must Be Done." Originally published in *Punch*, Thackeray's poem is short, rhymed, and includes the narrative turn that serves to pay off the reader:

> Dear Jack, this white mug that with Guinness I fill,
> And drink to the health of sweet Nan of the Hill,
> Was once Tommy Tosspot's, as jovial a sot,
> As e'er drew a spigot, or drain'd a full pot --
> In drinking, all round 'twas his joy to surpass,
> And with all merry tipplers he swigg'd off his glass.
>
> One morning in summer, while seated so snug,
> In the porch of his garden, discussing his jug,
> Stern Death, on a sudden, to Tom did appear,
> And said, 'Honest Thomas, come take your last bier;'
> We kneaded his clay in the shape of this can,
> From which let us drink to the health of my Nan. (Thackeray 142)

At two stanzas, "Dear Jack" is shorter than most of Service's poems. Nevertheless, it includes the three-part structure and humour that Service felt contributed to successful newspaper and periodical verse. Thackeray takes the plebeian pursuit of beer-drinking for his subject matter, a move of which Service undoubtedly approved. "Much of my work has been inspired by food and drink," he claims in *Ploughman of the Moon*, an earthy interest that once again reflects the influence of Burns (16). (Although open praise of alcohol seldom enters his earlier verse, the characters in Service's North enjoy their feasts of bannock, beans, and bacon, as well as heartening cups of tea.) The "attack" in Thackeray's poem consists of the speaker's memories of Tommy Tosspot and his gleeful consumption of beer. The build-up of the poem expands on Tommy's habits, reiterating "his joy to surpass, / And with all merry tipplers [to swig] off his glass." Thackeray exaggerates the hilarity of Tommy's situation through "drain'd a full pot," "merry tipplers," and "swigg'd off his glass," phrases that connote a life free from the shadow of death. Service similarly employs exaggeration through the words "wildly,"

"great," "long," and "last," to suggest the extremity of his bather's situation. In both poems, exaggeration creates the effect of humour rather than pathos.

Most significantly, a turn in the narrative brings the pay-off, the details of Tommy's life serving to render his actual fate most appropriate in spite of its grotesque quality. Having raised the possibility of a tragic conclusion by introducing the figure of Death, Thackeray gradually undercuts what at first appeared as a serious turn of events:

> Stern Death, on a sudden, to Tom did appear,
> And said, "Honest Thomas, come take your last bier."

A further pun on "kneaded" suggests the necessity of mirth instead of sorrow:

> We kneaded his clay in the shape of this can,
> From which let us drink to the health of my Nan.

The subversion of sobriety, in more ways than one, gives the poem an appeal that overturns the reader's expectations and makes it memorable. Service employs the device of a sudden, surprising turn in his own verse. In "It Must Be Done," the reader's realization that the denouement is a mere morning bath cancels the threatened horror. Neither suicide nor a dive into dangerous waters impends, and the poem parodies the theme of adventure with a surprise conclusion in much the same way that Thackeray's poem surprises the reader with its irreverent treatment of the dead. Both poems succeed because the turn in their narratives sharply opposes the expected conclusion.

Although Service set the tolerance of his audience for such works at three stanzas (*PM* 84), he allots an extra stanza to the "build-up" of "It Must Be Done" yet shows himself able to sustain the reader's attention in an ordinary incident. Having set the scene with minimal detail in the first stanza, he plays on the ambiguity of certain elements in the setting and employs a refrain to draw the reader towards the "pay-off." Service does not define the body of water by which his character stands, nor does he immediately explain the reason for the "pale and anguished brow." Instead, he charges the poem with tension through the imperative sense of "It must be done, and now," focussing the reader on the

urgency of the situation. During the two stanzas that lead to the explanation in the last stanza, Service documents the character's physical symptoms of anxiety, intensifying the reader's sense that a critical and irreversible moment is approaching. The grotesque detail of the character's "wildly staring eye" heightens the drama of the scene, and is an example of a technique that Service later uses in "The Ballad of One-Eyed Mike" (*BC* 51-55). The tone abruptly shifts from terror to comedy when the narrator reveals the wider picture, hitherto indicated to the reader solely through its effects on the bather. Similarly, the surprise ending in "The Cremation of Sam McGee," where what is hidden becomes manifest, dispels fear and provides a mirthful resolution.

About 1891, Service began to read the more avant-garde literature being produced in the late Victorian era. George Borrow's novel *Lavengro* inflamed his desire to live the life of a vagabond, while Thoreau's *Walden* encouraged him to seek a simple, reclusive life (*PM* 102-03). Like the democratic, humanitarian authors Henry Stephens Salt and Edward Carpenter who were his contemporaries, Service enthusiastically embraced the pastoral vision of Thoreau. Consequently, in 1892 he involved himself for a brief time in humanitarian and socialist activities, becoming what he calls a "proletarian prig" (*PM* 110). Political activism rapidly became distasteful to him, however, and he returned to reading, rather than acting upon, literature. A bohemian period followed: during the winter of 1893 he read "nothing but French books" (*PM* 119), guided by George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Service especially appreciated the naturalism of Émile Zola. Zola felt that a writer must face nature openly, accurately documenting the beast in man in much the same way as a scientist documents the progress of an experiment. Likewise, Service's vivid northern narratives, "'slices cut bleeding from life'" (Stouffer 63), record "nature . . . as it affects the minds and souls of men" (Hal 11). Both Zola and Service chronicle the struggle of individuals against circumstantial forces that undermine one's control of life "until the derangement or cessation of the action of a necessary and vital element has broken the

equilibrium or brought about some trouble or stoppage in the play of the animal machinery" (Zola 27). This derangement assumes the form of *dementia borealis* in Service's verse. It renders the mental equilibrium of the characters vulnerable to the vagaries of the northern environment; they no longer follow their own instincts but move at the bidding of the North. While Service is not a strict naturalist -- he allows for the involvement of Providence in human affairs -- he takes a naturalistic interest in observing the effects of the North on individuals. His characters accept the challenges that the region presents, but none leave the struggle as masters of their circumstances, even if they enter it believing themselves so. The North gets them.

One clear example of Service's debt to naturalism is "The Call of the Wild" (*SS* 25-27). The title appears to be a direct borrowing from the short story by Jack London, another significant influence on Service's career (*PM* 102). The call Service records falls on human ears, but the reversion of the dog Buck to a more primitive level in London's *The Call of the Wild* has its parallel in the wild's beckoning to the "you" of Service's poem. "They have soaked you in convention through and through" the speaker observes before objecting, "But can't you hear the wild? -- it's calling you" (*SS* 27). The wild demands the rejection of convention and the pursuit of freedom outside of society. Corresponding to "The Sounding of the Call" in London's story (122 ff), Service's poem creates the sense that such freedom is within reach of ordinary individuals. Indeed, the "let us go" of the last line suggests that the decision to accept "the simple things, the true things," and the life of "men who do things" has already occurred (*SS* 27). Henceforth the individual whom nature has reclaimed will feel "the savage strength of brute in every thew," and grow "bigger in the bigness of the whole" (*SS* 26) just as Buck gradually becomes a new creature when freed from the constraints of civilisation. In both Service's and London's depiction of the North, nature determines human actions, engaging them in an unequal contest that they generally lose. If one survives the weather, then one faces cabin fever, the onset of which is impossible to predict or prevent. *Dementia borealis*, the

phenomenon expressed in the Yukonism "*The North has got him*" (*BC* 39), arises from the determinants of the northern climate, solitude, and landscape. Together, these elements force the weak to succumb, and dementia seals their subjection to the North.

Despite the host of writers that Service claims as influences prior to his emigration, his critics have focussed almost exclusively on his relationship to Rudyard Kipling. As a popular literary balladeer and a contemporary of Service, Kipling offers an appropriate parallel. Service himself frequently mentions Kipling as a poetic influence and plays up the similarity first noticed by the Montreal journalist who labelled him the "Kipling of the Arctic World" (Garvin 450). Just as Kipling became identified with India, Service came to represent the Yukon and the Canadian North for the world's imagination. Service claims that Kipling's verse accompanied him on forest walks that ultimately issued in the contents of *Songs of a Sourdough* (*PM* 326), and so it is not surprising to discover echoes of Kipling's work in Service's. Indeed, many of the metres and most of the stanzaic patterns found in Service's northern verse appear in *Barrack-Room Ballads* (Johnson, "Age of Brass" 23). But Service drew on other Kipling texts as well. Critics primarily note that the verse of Kipling and Service presents similar material, shares a similar spirit, and often has a common narrative structure.

"The Shooting of Dan McGrew," for example, bears a marked resemblance to "The Ballad of Fisher's Boarding House." Both tales are set among wild characters in a rowdy establishment, and centre on a love-triangle. In Fultah Fisher's boarding house, Anne of Austria, Salem Hardieker's "Light o' Love" (*RKV* 42), sparks a fight between her man and the newcomer "Hans the blue-eyed Dane" (*RKV* 41). At the Malamute Saloon, "the lady that's known as Lou" is the "light-o'-love" at the centre of an engagement between the title character and "a miner fresh from the creeks" (*SS* 50). Ultimately, Hans and the miner are both robbed by the ladies in their respective poems and meet their nemesis during scenes sensed rather than witnessed. "A dance of shadows on the wall, / A knife-thrust unawares --" ensures Hans's death, which occurs "in Anne of Austria's

trembling hands" (*RKV* 43). Anne then escapes with "the little silver crucifix" he wore. The identical events occur in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew:"

> . . . the lights went out, and two guns blazed in the dark;
> And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men
> lay stiff and stark;
> Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan
> McGrew,
> While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady
> that's known as Lou. (*SS* 54)

Lou subsequently makes off with the miner's poke of gold. The likeness between the two poems is unmistakable.[1]

Similarly, "The Law of the Yukon" is Service's northern equivalent to Kipling's "The Law of the Jungle." Although the two show similar rhyme scheme, spirit, and phrasing, Service's ballad is much more confrontational, a quality heightened in *Songs of a Sourdough* by the prefatory poem that first appeared in the American edition under the title "The Land God Forgot" (*SY* 10). The fourth stanza sets the tone of the collection, proclaiming the land the central figure of the verses that follow:

> *O outcast land! O leper land!*
> *Let the lone wolf-cry all express --*
> *The hate insensate of thy hand,*
> *Thy heart's abysmal loneliness.* (*SS* v)

The land is malicious and spiritually void. In contrast, Kipling's jungle seems far more hospitable. "The Lair of the Wolf," part of the land, is a refuge (*RKV* 559), and the jungle sky is "old and . . . true" (558). The jungle is without malice towards its inhabitants, and allows the Head Wolf to supplement its laws when needed (560). It is an orderly society, quite unlike Service's Yukon, where order is simply conformity to the will -- or whim -- of the North. Although an inescapable law guides the course of Man and Wolf in their respective ballads, Kipling's jungle sets forth moral guidelines whereas Service's Yukon issues a blunt challenge. Service's men are in fact more like a pack of wolves, while Kipling's animals present a model for human society. The wilderness regulates the

humans, who cannot control themselves, but the wolves enjoy an idealistic harmony in willing submission to their environment.

Whereas Kipling's jungle offers laws to preserve "the strength of the Pack [in] the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf [in] the Pack" (*RKV* 558), Service's Yukon issues her law as an omen of destruction. The Yukon is indomitable, determining the future of those who accept her challenge. She bids those "strong for the red rage of battle" to fare forth, and promises two possible outcomes:

> "Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones
> Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons;
> Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat;
> But the others -- the misfits, the failures -- I trample under my feet." (*SS* 11)

The North is the active party in each confrontation, and victory or failure is a function of individual merit. The Yukon negates human effort; "I have clinched and closed with the naked North," confesses the sourdough, "yet the Wild must win in the end" (*SS* 32). The individual, even the sourdough grown knowledgeable in the ways of the Yukon, cannot gain control of circumstances, whereas in Kipling's jungle the wolves have some control over the outcome of their struggles. That the Yukon gilds some with treasure is entirely appropriate; gilding is the token of success. The sourdough may become rich with gold, but he also contracts *dementia borealis* and becomes a captive of the land. Rather than terrifying or subverting the individual, the ideal outcome of the law of the jungle is an edifying obedience to its precepts (*RKV* 560).

Although "the forces of Nature work sternly and inexorably" against humanity in the work of both writers (Whatley 301), Kipling's verse contains no parallel to the madness that afflicts Service's characters. India and the Yukon make different demands on the two writers, just as Australia elicits concessions to the Kiplingesque style in the work of A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson. Although the energetic manner and poetic metres may afford simple comparisons that prove the influence of Kipling, poets such as

Service emphasise different aspects of their respective regions that give their ballads unique characteristics.

The verse of Henry Lawson, for example, gained prominence at the same time as that of Kipling, and achieved for Australia the recognition that Kipling's won for India. But like Service, Lawson wrote in a distinctly national manner "instantly recognized by his readers as honest Australian," especially in his depiction of "the great grey plain, the wilderness of the Never-Never" and its people (Wright ix-x). Service likewise pleased Canadian reviewers because his work possessed "a distinct quality of Canadianism" and a spirit "unmistakably redolent of the soil of Canada" inspired by a similarly remote part of the nation (Hal 11). "Where we have the North," notes Canadian writer George Bowering, Australians "have the outback, and its apotheosis, Ayers Rock, is in the middle of the country, of that continent. But most Australians have never been to the outback. . . . So it is in Canada, with our great myth. Most Canadians have never been to the North" (309). Inaccessability renders both environments exotic to the urban readership of Lawson and Service. The opening stanza of Lawson's "On the Night Train" illustrates the kinship:

> Have you seen the Bush by moonlight, from the train, go running by,
> Here a patch of glassy water, there a glimpse of mystic sky?
> Have you heard the still voice calling, yet so warm, and yet so cold:
> "I'm the Mother-Bush that bore you! Come to me when you are old?"
> (Lawson 37)

The resemblance to "The Call of the Wild" is striking:

> Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on,
> Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore,
> Big mountains heaved to heaven, which the blinding sunsets blazon,
> Black canyons where the rapids rip and roar?
> . . . . . .
> There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star agleam to guide us,
> And the wild is calling, calling . . . let us go. (*SS* 25, 27)

Both poems reject the civility esteemed in Kipling's ballads, extolling instead the virtues of a possessive, if not severe, wilderness for the audience. The earthiness of

Lawson and Service also distinguishes them from Kipling, whose verse reflects the India of Britain's imperial era. The ballads are purposeful, but whereas Kipling maintains the importance of order and action, the others express a longing for freedom. The assertion that "the head and the hoof of the Law" in the jungle is "Obey!" (*RKV* 560) contrasts sharply with "the ringing, surging rebellion" of Lawson's ballads (Wright viii-ix), where the wilderness is a vast, unmastered region akin to the Yukon. The "mystic" element in Lawson's bush parallels the enigmatic, irresistible character of the call of Service's wild. Kipling's jungle is not as insistent in its demands, allowing people to come and go as they please.

Although the law of the jungle is more amenable to creatures than is the law of the Yukon, the climate is equally harsh in both corners of the Empire. When the politician Pagett visits India, he finds the heat and its associated ailments as unbearable as Sam McGee found the Yukon's cold. Pagett can return to his native land, however, whereas Sam finally succumbs to the cold because "the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell" (*SS* 55). Pagett averts madness by focussing on the prospect of his departure from India. In contrast, the North prevents McGee from returning to Tennessee, and he must endure its cold until death, preceded by dementia, releases him. The Yukon imprisons those who trifle with her, impressing them with a sense of her power. India does not personally force an explicit confession of her might from Pagett. "The travelled idiots who duly misgovern the land" (*RKV* 27) -- that is, misjudge the power of India's environment -- realize their error through reflection on their own experience. In contrast, the North wears violence on its sleeve, making its environment appear more threatening to humanity.

It is easy to over-emphasize Kipling's influence on Service. Service's daughter, for one, believes that too much has been made of their similarity (Lockhart 151). Service frequently parallels himself with Kipling, but he is also a *poseur*, not averse to encouraging such an association for the sake of his own privacy (Pacey, *Creative Writing* 86). He likely found the rhyme and narrative element in Kipling's work appealing, much as he had

earlier taken a liking to the verse of Burns. In his search for models, Service undoubtedly discovered Kipling both useful and ready-to-hand. Finding himself frequently asked to recite "Gunga Din" at Whitehorse socials a few years later, Service likely had Kipling uppermost in his mind when he sat down to write his Yukon ballads. Wallace Lockhart makes the further suggestion that Service felt his own work was of the same calibre as Kipling's, and therefore modelled it on that of the better-known poet (Lockhart 150-51).

Yet when Service left Scotland for America in the spring of 1896 at the age of twenty-two, he likened himself to Robert Louis Stevenson as described in *The Amateur Emigrant*. "I compared my experience with Stevenson's," he recalls, "wishing I could write half as well as he" (*PM* 140). Since Scottish emigrants headed largely to America as Stevenson had (Donaldson 112), Service understandably became oriented towards the States despite his Canadian destination. After several months in British Columbia, Service allowed the influence of Morley Roberts to unite his interest in the States with a desire to record his experiences. "As [he] got his material for *A Western Avernus*, so I would get mine by self-sought adventure" (*PM* 165). Service later incorporated the various scenes he witnessed in his depiction of the Yukon and Arctic regions, details revealing the importance of his meanderings to his sense of the American continent, the North, and the South. Eventually arriving in San Francisco in the fall of 1897, Service again recalled Stevenson, sitting "in a trance of happiness" before Stevenson's statue "worshipping at the shrine of [his] favourite hero." He also confesses an admiration of Bret Harte, who along with "the Argonauts, [and the 1849 California] gold rush, had romanticized" the city for him (*PM* 191). Significantly, when Service first heard of the Klondike during his California ramblings, he read a newspaper report that suggested the need of another Bret Harte to chronicle the new gold rush (*PM* 260). One might rightly say that Service acquired his inspiration to write of the Klondike through this American author.

Songs of a Sourdough includes at least one ballad written during his American peregrinations, "The Song of the Wage Slave" (*PM* 259). Geographically vague, the

ballad depicts the men Service saw lounging around a mission in Los Angeles, although it could easily describe a Klondike sourdough. Although it was not inspired by Canadian scenes, it seamlessly joins with ballads that were. Similarly, "The Call of the Wild" inquires of its audience, "Have you chummed up with the mesa? Do you know its moods and changes" (*SS* 26)? Service did, having rambled through Mexico in 1898 (*PM* 246-47). The wild that calls out in the poem acquires a new breadth with this knowledge. Thoreau's influence was still with Service, the freedom of any wilderness holding an undying charm for him. In writing of the Canadian North, Service could not continually characterize it as violent and antagonistic because of his abiding affection for the wild.

In America as in Scotland, Service published his work in weekly magazines and newspapers. He proclaims that "the proof of a poem is in the printing" (*PM* 88), and despite expressing nonchalance about publication in his autobiography, Service actively sought an audience for his work. The modelling of "It Must Be Done" on the work of published authors is but one example of his concern to please the public and get his verse in print. When Laura Berton noticed the similarity between "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill," Service's response reveals a developed recognition of his audience and its preferences. "That's the stuff the public wants," Berton recalls Service saying. "That's what they pay for. And I mean to give it to them" (74). Service constructed himself as a popular author, and his relationship with his audience evolved throughout his published career.

For example, *Songs of a Sourdough* was not written "with no thought of publication" over the course of one winter in Whitehorse (*PM* 326). In addition to the appearance of "The Song of the Wage Slave" in a Los Angeles paper in 1898 (*PM* 259), *Munsey's Magazine* published "Apart and Together" in 1903, a poem renamed "Unforgotten" in the *Sourdough* collection (*SS* 62). Nor was Service a poetical unknown in Whitehorse when he arrived there late in 1904; "The Little Old Log Cabin" had appeared in the town's *Semi-Weekly Star* in 1902. These examples indicate that several

items in his first collection of verse had originally proved themselves through newspaper publication. The success of *Songs of a Sourdough* prompted a follow-up, which took the form of *Ballads of a Cheechako*. Although "it expressed the spirit of the Yukon more than anything" else he did, Service hints that it was "written to order" for the purpose of keeping the broad audience that had bought his first book (*PM* 349-50).

By the time he wrote *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, Service was aiming his verse at a well-defined audience, and not merely "the public:" "I was after -- something the man in the street would take notice of and the sweet old lady would paste in her album; something the schoolboy would spout and the fellow in a pub would quote" (*PM* 458). This book received Service's considered attention, unlike his previous collections, and addresses itself to a broad popular audience. Yet while he seeks refinement that will please "the sweet old lady," he also aims to attract the attentions of "the man in the street," a reader with presumably coarser tastes. Service also bears in mind the suitability of his verse for recitation, another factor that maintains the tension between its possible audiences: his verse must suit both the classroom and the barroom. To negotiate the breadth of his audience, Service adopts a Burnsian simplicity in his diction and style. He eschews the bawdiness of Burns when addressing his audience, patterning his verse instead on the respectable works that won his predecessor a place in the hearts of a wider assortment of readers. Service never achieves the bawdiness of his literary model, despite charges of ribaldry (Wallace 3), but he wins an audience eager for a literature novel and exciting in content and expression, yet not necessarily avant-garde in form. Service maintains his respectability even while writing of disreputable characters.

In the "Prelude" that prefaces *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, Service eschews the traditional themes of Romantic poetry. "I am no wordsmith dripping gems divine," he says, choosing to pursue "a lusty love of life and all things human" in his verse instead (*RRS* 9). In the second stanza he embraces the sentiments that he believes appeal to his readers: "Still in me leaps the wonder of the boy, / A pride in man, a deathless faith in

woman" (*RRS* 9). This profession is calculated to win the respect of the old lady, as well as to provide a model for younger readers whose enthusiasm for life he shares. The line, "Still the red blood calls, still rings the valiant fray" (*RRS* 9), aims the collection at a masculine audience, characterized by "the man in the street" who longs for adventure. While defining his material against sophisticated concepts of poetry, Service is perpetually conscious of his craft, and recognizes that he must write his verse well. "Honey is honey-sweet, howe'er the hiving" he declares (*RRS* 10). He does not compromise his standards simply because he is a popular versifier.

Service's verse provided the stimulus that early twentieth-century, middle-class urban readers sought. Jay Johnson points out that they wanted "images exotic enough to be romantic and exciting, but familiar enough to be unthreatening" ("Age of Brass" 15). Although the content of the poems came from an area of Canada inaccessible to most readers and chronicled a way of life greatly removed from their own experiences and sensibilities, the language that constructed and conveyed it came from a middle-class writer. In addition to the language and the themes that Service chose to emphasize, his use of Kipling's metres made the exotic content of his ballads palatable. Although some readers objected to Service's concentration on the seamier sides of Yukon life -- the ladies of the Whitehorse sewing-circle were dismayed at his writing "so much about the bad women of the town" while saying "nothing about the good ones" (*PM* 332) -- the phenomenal sales of *Songs of a Sourdough* indicate that objections were few.

The vigour and novelty of the scenes Service portrayed gained him not only a Canadian, but also an American and British audience. While Johnson claims that Service's appeal in Canada was rooted in a nationalist desire to know more about different regions in the country, his thesis fails to account for Service's popularity outside of Canada. The enthusiasm of American and British audiences for his Yukon ballads cannot arise from nationalist sentiments, but rather from a taste for exciting narratives set in a distant country. Foreign enthusiasm arguably surpasses that of Canadians for Service's literary

representation of Canada. A brief look at the publishing history of *Songs of a Sourdough* sheds greater light on the audience Service's writing attracted, and how it developed prior to *Ballads of a Cheechako*. Not only did the presentation of the collection change, but so did the form in which it appeared on the market. These shifts outline the image of Canada offered to readers, and also the publishers' awareness of the readers themselves.

First published in February 1907 by the Methodist Book and Publishing House of Toronto under the imprint of William Briggs, the original volumes were not impressive. "How I swore!" recalls Russel Bond, the salesman initially entrusted with selling *Songs of a Sourdough*, and an immediate Service enthusiast.

> It was a poor-looking, thin book, bound in green cloth, marked Author's Edition. . . . It was listed at 75 cents retail. I was indignant. I wrote immediately to William Briggs, stating that I had been selling it as a $1 book, retail. Furthermore, I said, if the office people would check their orders they would see that the first edition must be just about sold out. And I offered the opinion that it was the first book of Canadian poetry we'd published that had good commercial possibilities, and we should own it on a royalty basis. (Bond 8)

Bond's actions directed *Songs of a Sourdough* at a more specific audience than Briggs originally had in mind. His selling of the book at a dollar a copy gave it a prestige over volumes priced at seventy-five cents. Furthermore, people were willing to pay the higher price. The expense did not limit the size of its audience, and the unusual sales figures of twenty-five copies in Calgary, thirty-six in Lethbridge, and five in Fort William (now Thunder Bay) based on readings from the galley proofs confirm that the book was an immediate best-seller (Bond 8). Service not only modelled himself as a popular poet, but he successfully reached a popular audience and thereby convinced his publishers to own the work on a royalty basis. Bond's identification of the book as Canadian indicates that its success also lay in its local interest, that is, its exotic, yet familiar character that Johnson identifies.

Nevertheless, Briggs did little to develop this acquisition to his company's list of titles. Nor did T. Fisher Unwin, the book's British publisher, who initially foresaw great difficulties in selling poetry by an unknown foreign author (Unwin 98). It fell to the American publishers to develop its marketing possibilities. When Edward Stern of Philadelphia and Barse & Hopkins of New York accepted *Songs of a Sourdough* for publication in the United States in the fall of 1907, they retitled it *The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses* and included seven new poems. The augmentation prompted a reordering of the original contents, and the result was a much more prepossessing collection. Instead of merely setting Service's words in type as Briggs had done, the American publishers organized the material with an eye to commercial success. Subsequent Canadian editions, however, retained the original appearance of the collection as much as possible, and British editions did likewise.

Stern's alterations to *Songs of a Sourdough* signal an attempt to create an image for Service and the Canadian North that would attract readers. The American edition rendered the themes of the collection more accessible by retitling it "*The Spell of the Yukon*." "*Songs of a Sourdough*" did not have the immediate appeal of "*The Spell of the Yukon*" because the term 'sourdough' was a Yukonism that mystified many people. *The Spell of the Yukon* also included first lines with the titles in its table of contents. A page dedicating the volume "To C. M." heightened the formality and professional appearance of the collection. Russel Bond suggests that the American alterations occurred to protect copyright (8), but the initial five poems of the American edition are instrumental in constructing an expectation of Service's poetry for the reader and suggest another motive. The addition of "The Land God Forgot" as a preface removes the reader from civilization to a primitive world where "the fell arch-spirit of the Wild" dominates a desolate land (*SY* 10). By focussing attention on the land rather than its inhabitants, the collection identifies the geographical reality of the Yukon with its fictional construction as "The Land God Forgot." The recurrence of "lone," either in itself or as part of a larger word, stresses

human isolation from familiar surroundings, and creates in the opening poem an expectation of the exotic scenes that readers sought.

Stern waits until the third poem in the collection before naming the narrator who "scrabbled and mucked like a slave" for gold (*SY* 11). "The Heart of the Sourdough" identifies the character as not merely a prospector who lives off sourdough bread, but a type of person who, lured by "the timeless things," has "learned to defy and defend" (*SY* 16). The vivid, first person voice of subsequent narratives allows readers to identify with the reckless, carefree figure of the sourdough. Rooted in his response to his circumstances, Service's sourdough invites readers who desire a life of adventure to join him in the primitive struggle with nature as an escape from the complexities of urban existence. The risk of *dementia borealis* lent an excitement to the adventure.

By placing poems such as "The Heart of the Sourdough" at the beginning of the volume, Stern forcefully extends an invitation to the reader to move beyond the limits of ordinary human experience. The fifth poem, "The Law of the Yukon," confirms the invitation to enter into a relationship with nature. The land itself challenges the reader who identifies with the hardy sourdough to try living in the North. While the poem provides a forceful, direct opening to the British and Canadian editions, its subordination in the American edition suggests that marketability demanded a more subdued tone. However, its position may also suggest a vital difference between Canadian and American perceptions of Canada. Whereas *Songs of a Sourdough*, with its initial challenge to virility, achieved popularity among Canadians who foresaw the twentieth as Canada's century (Johnson, "Age of Brass" 15), *The Spell of the Yukon* gained equal reknown among an American populace no less confident in the promise of the coming century. The difference, however, lay in the fact that while Canada was moving out towards its fringes (Johnson, "Age of Brass" 16), expanding its horizons in response to the century's challenge, the United States was engaging in a quest for novelty beyond its material success. Metaphorically, Canadians were confident of receiving the treasure promised in

"The Law of the Yukon," whereas Americans were discovering that material success is not all (*SY* 11). Notably, Tad Tuleja remarks in a recent anthology that Service's verse continues to offer this lesson to Americans, and anyone else consumed by wealth (xvii).

Stern clearly designed Service's first collection of verse to appeal to an urban audience seeking escape from mundane lives. His efforts were successful, and by the end of 1907 he published an illustrated edition of the collection. Pocket sized and leather-bound editions also appeared, in addition to several more printings of the regular cloth-bound one. Having experienced the success of *Songs of a Sourdough / The Spell of the Yukon*, Service's publishers were ready for *Ballads of a Cheechako*. When it appeared in 1909, it was available in an array of illustrated and non-illustrated editions. This mass appeal of Service's verse was indebted to his depiction of the North that presented a remote, and therefore exotic, frontier to an urban populace seeking excitement and a simpler lifestyle. The Klondike setting also contributed to its popularity: ten years earlier, "in most of the civilized world, . . . the Klondike had become the chief topic of the day" (Berton, *Klondike* 110). *Songs of a Sourdough* tapped into this interest, still potent ten years later and ripe for mythologization.

II: The Manifestations

The summation of Service's representation of the Candian North is the Yukonism "*The North has got him*" that serves as an epigraph to "The Ballad of Pious Pete" in *Ballads of a Cheechako* (39). The *Cheechako* collection fed a public appetite whetted by *Songs of a Sourdough* for tales of those who succumbed to the might of the North. The manner in which the North gets Pete is central to understanding Service's conception of *dementia borealis* and the effect of life north of the sixtieth parallel. The advent of winter triggers Pete's madness and reveals the destructive power of the region:

> Then a shuddery breath like the coming of Death crept down from the peaks far away;
> The water was still, the twilight was chill, the sky was a tatter of gray.
> Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold the lights of the witches arose;
> The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley was cinched by the stark and cadaverous snows.
> The trees were like lace where the star-beams could chase, each leaf was a jewel agleam.
> The soft white hush lapped the Northland and wrapped us round in a crystalline dream. (*BC* 40-41)

The North menaces over the two men during the summer (*BC* 40), but only the winter landscape and the isolation it enforces grants the North mastery over Sam and Pete. The two men no longer see each other regularly as they had during the summer, and Pete becomes a prey to his imagination, while Sam becomes a "scurvy-degenerate wreck" (*BC* 44). When winter clinches and cinches the valley, the appearance of the northern lights adds a terrifying new character that the North did not possess in the summer. To Pete, the lights are of far greater import than the snows that wrap the men around. In his enforced isolation, his piety identifies them as "the lights of the witches."

These lights signify the mystery and splendour of the North, fascinating those from southern climes unused to their appearance. Service makes full use of their historical association with supernatural and ghostly phenomena to characterize the other-worldliness

of the region. For North American Natives, including the Tlingit Indians of the southern Yukon, as well as the Scots, the lights were an ominous glow from the spirit world that historically foretold battle and disaster (Brekke & Egeland 2, 4). Likewise in Service's verse, they beckon one to where "the light of hell-fire flows / Into the bowl of the midnight sky, violet, amber and rose" (*SS* 31). They illuminate the uncouth nature of the North, a region lit by the fire of hell and therefore a challenge to respectable, urban society. This subversive quality offers an adventurous alternative to stifled urban readers dissatisfied with their ordered, civilized lives. The North is 'awful,' in the older sense of the word, inspiring awe at the grandeur of an environment that fosters madness, and horror at its ability to master people. This blend of hellish energy and the lure of adventure leads to a spartan lifestyle that engages one in the life of "men who do things" (*SS* 27). The life beneath the lights is foreign to civilized society, and therefore dangerous, even damnable, to embrace. In "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" the lights complement the severity of the environment:

> Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
> And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could *hear;*
> . . . . . .
> A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
> While high overhead, green, yellow and red, the North Lights swept in bars. (*SS* 52)

The rippling colours of the northern lights seem to laugh silently at the human folly enacted below. They suggest a sinister, menacing presence in a land of "strange things" and "queer sights" (*SS* 55). Service reserves them to identify scenes of malignant import. Although "The Ballad of One-Eyed Mike" refers to them as "the Glories" (*BC* 51), they do not illuminate the glory of the northern landscape for Service. Their light is "the weird auroral ray" (*BC* 55), weirdness in the ancient Anglo-Saxon sense of an unpredictable destiny akin to the determinism that affects human life in the North.

For Pious Pete, the northern lights are an unnatural force in league with witches and the unregenerate Sam Noot. The severity of the climate turns Pete's imagination in on itself, isolating it from any sense of reality. He perceives "the wings of God's angels ashine" in the glittering snow and the flickering, multicoloured northern lights as demonic serpents (*BC* 41-42). In his madness he invests the North with a malevolent character that inevitably sets it in conflict with humanity. The land overwhelms him, just as it overwhelms the speaker in "The Land God Forgot." Unlike the sourdough, Pete allows *dementia borealis* to divorce him from reality, and thereby destroy him. Whereas the sourdough admires the majesty of the North, Pete resists it and becomes a casualty. Pete admits that his perceptions are "all in the point of view," a fact highlighted when he confronts "the scurvy-degenerate" Sam Noot with a rifle (*BC* 42, 44). Despite the ravages of scurvy, Sam rationally confronts the new trial. His capitulation to Pete takes into account his partner's madness that brooks no opposition.

"The Parson's Son" and "The Spell of the Yukon" provide examples of the two main variations on *dementia borealis*. The former is an example of a man trampled under the feet of the North, while the latter is a confession of love for the land. In both cases, the speaker initially chooses the Yukon on account of her gold, but ends up being captivated by the land itself. The northern lights are integral to the setting of "The Parson's Son," where they supply the sole light in the opening scene, defined as one of "the wild, weird nights when the northern lights shoot up from the frozen zone" (*SS* 17). Despite having lived "a wild, free, fearless life," the parson's son admits that he has "lost the game" (*SS* 18), chiefly on account of the madness that infected his mates and himself. "We were all mad," he claims (*SS* 19), and the source of their disease was a rumour of gold. When the land opens to receive an influx of prospectors that destabilizes the pre-gold rush society of the Yukon, Dawson becomes a morally-open town. Unable to adjust to the new conditions, the parson's son curses the territory (*SS* 17). As does the advent of

winter in "The Ballad of Pious Pete," the sudden alteration in circumstances grants the Yukon mastery.

Following the onset of his gold-lust, the parson's son succumbs to a lovesickness that leads to alcoholism. "It put me queer," he says of his failed relationship with a dance-hall girl, "Till I found myself in the bughouse ward with a claim staked out on death" (*SS* 19). His attitude towards the environment demands that he "play up . . . and play the game" (*SS* 20), but this conventional stance fails amid the social instability of Dawson. This new game does not follow a familiar set of rules. The gold attracts a permissive society that subverts his past relationship with the Yukon. Instead of being "a great big [happy] family . . . beyond the pale of the law" (*SS* 18), the members of the family become mad, no longer free, but casualties of *dementia borealis*. *Dementia borealis* secures the demise of the parson's son by blinding him to the real state of affairs, and the cold hushes his delirious moaning. In a significant twist at the end, his huskies, maddened by the harsh circumstances of the Yukon though part of its wild world, devour him. The Yukon works through dementia to claim those who enter her precincts. The parson's son, mad himself, views a mad world that possesses its own law. Its power rests in its refusal to conform to foreign, southern laws and conventions. It is "beyond the pale" of civilized structures (*SS* 18).

In contrast, the speaker in "The Spell of the Yukon" suffers the madness of a patriot rather than of an adversary. Having learned to accomodate the Yukon and enjoy the solitude, he proves himself worthy of her treasure by accepting her mastery. Although he originally came north for gold, embracing the Yukon's challenge in confidence, the speaker finds himself ambushed, as did the parson's son. "I wanted the gold and I got it," he confesses,

> Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
> And somehow the gold isn't all.
>
> No! There's the land. (Have you seen it?)

It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it,
To the deep, deathlike valleys below.
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe: but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth -- and I'm one. (*SS* 21)

Having fulfilled his original purpose in the Yukon, the speaker realizes that a force hitherto unrecognized determines the course of his life. He expresses animosity for the land -- "It's the cussedest land that I know," he says -- but love tempers his animosity. "Cussedest" is a term of endearment opposed to the parson's son's blunt admission that he has "cursed" the land. The claim that he would trade the Yukon "for no land on earth" confirms his love. He cannot ignore its attraction, and though he does not understand how, he knows that "it twists you from foe to a friend" (*SS* 22). Human antagonism towards the land is a given -- it is cussed, even as it is endearing -- and this very element allows the Yukon to maintain its hold. Just as the parson's son refuses to relinquish the hope of continuing to "mush down the trail" (*SS* 20), the speaker in "The Spell of the Yukon" takes delight in facing the challenge the land presents. "It isn't the gold that I'm wanting," he reflects, "So much as just finding the gold" (*SS* 24). In his delirium, the parson's son recalls "play up . . . and play the game," but realizes that he himself has "lost the game" on account of the Yukon's diversions (*SS* 20, 18). In contrast, the speaker in "The Spell of the Yukon" never tires of the game, having become mad with enthusiasm for it. He is antagonized and haunted by the lure of the land, yet unaccountably at peace. A cheerful disposition is part of the reason that he survives while the parson's son becomes a casualty. He cusses the land with good humour, but the parson's son anathematizes the North and divorces himself from any possibility of fulfilment therein. The aspirations of the sourdough are satisfied when he falls under the spell of the Yukon, but the spell turns sour for the parson's son.

In *Songs of a Sourdough*, the North dominates the imaginations of its inhabitants, fascinating friends and enemies alike. Through the first person voices it seeps into the consciousness of the reader as well. If it offers readers an imaginative refuge from the pressures of urban life by pulling them towards "the beauty that fills [one] with wonder, / [and] the stillness that fills [one] with peace" (*SS* 24), it also warns against reliance on social conventions such as prayers and platitudes, as opposed to self-determination. The parson's son fails in part because when he embraces the "life beyond the pale of the law" he does not reckon the extent of the excesses that developed during the gold rush (*SS* 18). He succumbs to the might of the Yukon by failing to acknowledge his limits. There are no conventions in Dawson to prevent him from going first mad, and then to Hell. Neither a reminder to "play the game" nor reciting the Lord's Prayer defends him. In contrast, the speaker in "The Spell of the Yukon" fights, "and you bet it's no sham-fight" (*SS* 23). His resistance to and distrust of reality ultimately renders him fit for the Yukon; he faces her with the canny ferocity that she displays herself. In "The Man from Eldorado," the protagonist experiences deception in the moral wilderness of the North, and though "he knows that it can never be . . . / Life leers at him with foul and fetid breath" (*BC* 75). He did not distrust nor fight the influence of the North, and like the parson's son, fails to survive the moral ambush he encounters.

The previous poems explore the ability of the land to master individuals with benevolence or malignance, but "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee" further define the relation between madness and the North by linking *dementia borealis* to specific elements that have achieved stereotypical status as representations of the region: the extreme cold of winter, and the omnipresence of the wilderness, known as "the Great Alone" in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" (*SS* 52). Not only does the specificity of focus contribute to the appeal of the ballads, but the use of stereotypes reinforces popular perceptions of Canada. Service uses both aspects of the North as sources of humour and awe.

In "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," life in "the Great Alone" has weakened the unknown miner from the creeks and induced a "gnawing hunger . . . for a home and all that it means" (*SS* 52). Contributing more to a sense of melodrama than humour, Service employs "the Great Alone" to evoke awe at the ability of the land to gain mastery over the weak. The openness drives the stranger to crazed frustration, just as "the great, big broad land 'way up yonder" fills some with peace (*SS* 24). The North claims him as her own, and he elicits the same response from the revellers at the Malamute as does the land. An enigma, he holds their eyes [illegible] spell," the choice of words instantly recalling "The Spell of the Yukon" (*SS* 51). His ability to command their attention with his musical representation of the North and its desolation strengthens the audience's identification of him with the land.

Like the land's effect on the nameless miner, the music cuts to the core and finds the weakness of Dan and Lou. The very language describes an assault, both physical and verbal:

> The music almost died away . . . then it burst like a pent-up flood;
> And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes were blind with blood.
> The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it stung like a frozen lash,
> And the lust awoke to kill, to kill . . . then the music stopped with a crash. (*SS* 53)

The violent outpouring of emotion results in a metaphorical internal hemorrhage and stings the listeners "like a frozen lash." Incubated in the frozen wilderness, the miner's desire for revenge allows "the hate insensate" (*SS* v) of the fierce northern environment to invade the human community. As in "The Parson's Son," the excesses of the town intensify and complement the effect of the land. The narrator of "Dan McGrew" does not deny "that the stranger was crazed with 'hooch'" (*SS* 54), but the dementia is merely a symptom of the larger madness of the North that first arose in "the Great Alone" and provoked the urge for hooch. Not only does the isolation of the wilderness create a desire

for riotous release in the town, but solitude has also allowed the wrong McGrew wrought to fester in the stranger. The effects of the ferment become manifest when the stranger emerges from isolation into the Malamute saloon. Similarly, the land, as represented in the stranger's piano playing, awakes a mad lust to kill that parallels the uncontrollable desire for gold that dawned on the parson's son unawares when the land first revealed her treasure at Bonanza.

The frigidity of the land in "The Cremation of Sam McGee" provides Service with an opportunity for humour in the context of *dementia borealis*. The grip of cold on a body is tangible evidence that the North has got someone, and the cold also leads Sam McGee to make a strange request of his partner. Bound to obey Sam's wishes by "the stern code" of the trail that demands fidelity to friends and promises (*SS* 57), Cap finds himself entangled in his partner's madness:

> Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a
> sort of moan:
> "It's the cursèd cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through
> to the bone.
> Yet 'taint being dead, it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;
> So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."
>
> A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;
> And we started on at the break of dawn, but God! he looked ghastly pale.
> He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;
> And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.
> (*SS* 56-57)

The Yukon afflicts Sam, whose love of Tennessee and its warmth contrasts sharply with his fear and hatred of the Canadian climate. Even though "the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell" (*SS* 55), it does not assuage his longing for home. As he pursues his quest for gold, the perpetual cold takes its toll on his sanity. Sam's original fervour gives way to an obsession with the temperature. It prompts his request for cremation and the subsequent delirium in which he raves constantly "of his home in Tennessee." The northern cold obsesses him by its contrast with the warmth of the South. Sam's madness

touches Cap, who finds himself "horror driven" and eventually "half mad" as he carries the corpse to a suitable crematorium (*SS* 57, 58). The cold that obsesses and kills Sam binds Cap to fulfill his promise. Cap feels the same towards the corpse as Sam towards the temperature, and both causes of madness are intractable.

Sam speaks from a furnace at the end, the humour of the reversal centering on his fear that the elements might infringe on his peace posthumously. "[His] awful dread of the icy grave" disturbs him in life, and he is quick to warn Cap from "the heart of the furnace roar; / . . . 'Please close that door. / . . . I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm" (*SS* 56, 59). Cremation is the only escape from the northern climate: the North gets Sam alive, but Sam takes revenge on it in the afterlife. Perhaps Cap's half-mad state contributes to and embellishes his vision of Sam in the furnace, just as Pious Pete mistakes the glow of the northern lights for wriggling worms, but the result in both cases is a humourous perspective on madness. The visions of Cap and Pete are elements of the tall-tale, a genre that renders reality absurd. The reality of the North becomes manageable as a result, the absurdity comforting those whom the northern cold or wilderness beleaguers.

Noting the success of *Songs of a Sourdough*, Service composed *Ballads of a Cheechako* nearly entirely of items similar in style to "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." The volume pitches the theme of "the North has got him" at his audience with greater confidence. The bank transferred him to Dawson in 1909, and Service's direct experience of the Klondike region that inspired much of his *Sourdough* material transforms his fictional Dawson from the Wild West frontier town of Dan McGrew to the more realistic, but no less wild, setting of "The Man from Eldorado." Although his residency in Dawson perhaps prompted him to veil the town under the name of "Klondike City" in the later ballad (*BC* 75), he pictures the North as no less vicious towards humanity. Its possession of people acquires a greater poignancy, however, as a result of Service's experience in the Klondike. "I loved the midnight melancholy of the haunted streets," he recalls, "I pensively roamed these empty streets, a solitary and dreamful mourner. . . . Thus I

absorbed an atmosphere that eluded all others" (*PM* 349). Listening to the ghosts of the town, Service attuned himself to a side of the Klondike different from the boisterous world of Dan McGrew.

"The Man from Eldorado" provides a closer look at a fellow like the parson's son, and the whoop-ups that took place at saloons such as the Malamute. Like "the miner fresh from the creeks" who shoots Dan McGrew, the man from Eldorado arrives in town wearing a buckskin shirt looking none too respectable. Yet his hope of a civilized, settled life, exemplified in town and home, fills the opening lines of the ballad. The initial stanza describes the man "just arrived in town," culminating the scene by noting the "bunch of gold dust in his sack" (*BC* 70). He is not weary without cause, and the second stanza emphasizes his powerful distaste of the life he lived in the bush -- "Thank God, he'll never see the place again" -- and reiterates the fact that makes all his hardships worthwhile: "it's over and his poke is full of gold" (*BC* 70-71). The third stanza completes the opening section with details of the distasteful work he did, and his hope for the pleasant, pastoral life of "-- Home" (*BC* 71). A strong hope in the new life ahead leaves him oblivious to potential disaster. *Songs of a Sourdough* makes it quite clear that individuals do not determine their destiny; the Yukon has her own law. The thought of heading to an idyllic home is pleasant, but when the man boldly declares, "Boys, here is where the shaggy North and I will shake; / I thought I'd never manage to get free," his confidence invites the fury of the North (*BC* 72). And unlike "Dan McGrew," where the town simply provides a setting for the stranger's outburst, Klondike City actively victimizes the man from Eldorado. The denizens of the town rise up against him, barring his departure until they satisfy their appetites.

The North is just as destructive in the town as out. The excess of both poverty and luxury places the miner at risk. Through the lures of pleasures long-denied him, the man from Eldorado finds his weakness laid bare. "In a whirl of senseless riot he is ramping up and down; / There's nothing checks his madness and his lust" (*BC* 74); he

cannot control his drive to indulge amid the freedom of his circumstances, and he experiences a form of *dementia borealis* in consequence. The moral laxity of the town sparks his madness. His acquaintances encourage him in his celebration at returning home, but their behaviour belies their selfishness:

> They wished him honor, happiness and wealth.
> They drank unto his wife to be -- that unsuspecting maid;
> They drank unto his children half a score;
> . . . . . .
> They know they've got him going; he is buying wine for all;
> They crowd around as buzzards at a feast,
> Then when his poke is empty they boost him from the hall,
> And spurn him in the gutter like a beast. (*BC* 72-74)

He finds himself among a crowd of opportunists who reduce him to the level of a beast, but are like animals -- specifically, buzzards -- themselves. The analogy heightens near the end, when he scatters his poke around the room and the people "fight, and snarl, and claw, like beasts of prey" (*BC* 76). These images construct the town as a moral wilderness counterpointing the geographic wilderness that sheltered him from depravity. The man from Eldorado's demise in Klondike City complements the parson's son's experience of Dawson as a spot unrivalled in its ability to hustle souls to hell, solidifying the image of the frontier as a wild and reckless place (*SS* 19).

Klondike City more fully illustrates the urban wilderness that the miners face because it is a terminus. Dawson, on the other hand, is a place of departures and movement; souls hustle to hell, while the parson's son leaves to die in the wilderness beyond the town. Just as the natural wild claims the parson's son, so too the urban wild, being of the North, devours the man from Eldorado. Death occurs in the northern wilderness, but whereas the parson's son dies alone in his cabin, the man from Eldorado collapses in the public environment of the gutter. He is a feast, not for huskies, but for his fellow humans whose response to his scattered poke recalls the frenzied feeding of the dogs that tear the parson's son "flesh from bone" (*SS* 20). Parallel images in the first and

final sections of the ballad also indicate the power of the North both inside and outside of town. While working his claim in the bush, the man from Eldorado subsisted on canned goods that shot "his system full of lead" (*BC* 71). Following his spree in town, he is also full of lead, only more conclusively: "A clotted Colt was in his hand, a hole was in his head," states the narrator (*BC* 77), the lead absorbed in the urban wilderness proving more potent than that ingested in the bush. Danger exists in each locale, and it indicates that both the city and the wilderness are complementary aspects of the North, which ultimately works its will with individuals.

The North-West Mounted Police are as susceptible to the assaults of the North as the isolated, gold-maddened miners in Service's verse. Service employs the Mountie as a standard character of fiction set in the Canadian northwest, but he subverts the popular image and reveals him to be on a par with any other character. Contemporary popular writers such as Gilbert Parker, whom Desmond Pacey suggests that Service imitated (Pacey, *Creative Writing* 73), routinely depicted Mounties as stern, dedicated workers who faced death fearlessly. In "The Patrol of the Cypress Hills," Sergeant Fones freezes to death a short distance from his barracks. He receives a promotion, the narrator ironically comments, for performing his duty to the last. The grim reality of Fones's death testifies to the integrity that prompts his promotion, both within the Force and to the afterlife, and it is a cause for solemn rejoicing. In contrast, Service's Constable Clancy contracts severe frostbite and a case of *dementia borealis* that leaves him howling "like a husky" (*BC* 128), while "The Black Sheep" presents a Mountie who is "a damned disgrace to the force" (*BC* 88).

If the miners are obsessed with gold, then the Mounted Police are overly preoccupied with duty and success, for "it's duty, duty, first and last, the Crimson Manual saith . . . / And so they sweep the solitudes, free men from all the earth" (*BC* 119). Of course, the North grants individual freedom to no one, and the Crimson Manual indoctrinates its believers with an arrogance such as the North delights in exposing.

Clancy boasts that "he [can] cinch like a bronco the Northland" (*BC* 121), and the attentive reader of Service awaits the onset of *dementia borealis*. Although Clancy sets out to rescue a madman, he remains undismayed at the North and the dementia that it threatens to induce. Only when he reaches the crazed man does he begin "to face the Wild" (*BC* 123). Cap begins to contract a form of Sam's madness as the full burden of his promise begins to settle on him, and Clancy likewise encounters his most severe trial when he attempts to return his prisoner to civilization. The Wild refuses to let the constable escape unscathed with his charge. It determines to crush Clancy with an authority akin to that of the Yukon when she issued her Law:

> Said the Wild, "I will crush this Clancy, so fearless and insolent;
> For him will I loose my fury, and blind and buffet and beat;
> Pile up my snows to stay him; then when his strength is spent,
> Leap on him from my ambush and crush him under my feet." (*BC* 123)

The term "ambush" recalls the experiences of the sourdough in "The Spell of the Yukon" and the parson's son, whom the desolation and solitude of the Wild caught unawares, but Clancy continues in spite of the difficulties that confront him.

The cold is Clancy's main opponent, as it is Sam McGee's, and the madman he rescues sings the praise of conditions that would appal Sam, particularly the desire for "a grave deep down in the ice and snow" (*BC* 124). Clancy finds himself sore-pressed under such circumstances. When the last of his sled-dogs succumbs to the cold his sense of duty compels him to continue to oppose the Wild, and he takes the place of the dogs in the traces and hauls the sled back to the Mounted Police barracks himself. Although he epitomizes the Mountie ideal of duty, the North gets him and he succumbs to the effects of his journey. Howling like a husky, he sings a nonsensical song that parallels the madman's ditties. This howling reflects his brief assumption of the role of his dogs, prompted by the devotion to duty that led him to oppose the Wild. Service places Clancy in a fierce situation, and the Wild emerges superior, in accordance with the will of the indomitable

North. Clancy does not cinch the Northland as he intended, and the deflation of the Mountie image challenges the conventional representation of the Force.

"The Black Sheep" offers a similar correction of the popular image of the Mounties. This particular member of the legendary Mounted Police is not on patrol, braving the North in the line of duty, nor is he particularly heroic in character. Like many of the miners Service depicts, his circumstances ambush him, and he is quite baffled as to what warranted his "six months hard [labour]" (*BC* 88). As the ballad progresses, however, one discovers that a corrupt strain taints the Mounted Police as much as it taints the society that they aim to protect. The italicized preface to the ballad offers an irony in its imputation of a strain of stain to the protagonist. The more serious fault lies in the hierarchy of the Police. Cast off to Canada, both the individual on the woodpile and "Grubbe, of the City Patrol" (*BC* 89), discover a freedom unknown in England. "Where I have been won't matter," says the disgraced Mountie, and Grubbe surely feels the same (*BC* 90). For the latter, the Canadian wilderness offers the chance to get even with an upperclassman from Eton. His older schoolmate, meanwhile, bears the brunt of this use of the wilderness, and dreams of returning to England.

In the back of beyond that is the North, the two men meet in a new order that reverses their social positions. Service records this perverse reordering through Grubbe, who no longer fags for his mate from Eton. Instead, the North takes possession of him in order to reverse the prospect of success that the epigraph attributes to those who enter the ranks of the Mounted Police, where "the aristocratic ne'er-do-well" ought rightly to find a place for himself (*BC* 88). While Grubbe becomes a respected member of the Police, he manipulates the hierarchy of the force to disgrace his Eton superior. As in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," the wilderness infiltrates human society and destabilizes it. The tacit collapse of order in "The Black Sheep" is motivated by an obsession for revenge. The isolation of the North permits Grubbe to accomplish his perverse, demented scheme. The North, to the friends and relations of Grubbe and his victim, is a place that won't matter in

years to come (*BC* 90). Therefore, any act, ignoble or otherwise, is possible and negligible. Like the North, Grubbe is "unmerciful" (*BC* 92), and he emerges victorious from his renewed encounter with the ballad's speaker.

The scope of *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* encompasses a greater variety of scenes than *Ballads of a Cheechako*. Although "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" confronts the reader with "the highest North" and "the Arctic Sea" (*BC* 18, 19), its setting awaits development in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*. Service intended this third volume of verse to represent the Arctic rather than the Yukon (*PM* 458), and what separates "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" from Service's uniquely Arctic material are its references to the quest for gold and "the trail of Ninety-Eight" (*BC* 16). It is not so fully of the High North as to forget the Klondike; it still draws its major inspiration from the territory below the Arctic Circle. As in *Songs of a Sourdough*, *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* includes several hymns to the natural beauty of the North that suggest that Service himself had contracted a benign *dementia borealis*, but his imminent departure for Europe indicates that this was probably a calculated element. Yet "The Nostomaniac" and "I'm Scared of It All" favourably juxtapose the North with the South, an apposition afforded by Service's trip to New York city and Cuba in 1910, and his trip overland to Dawson via the Mackenzie River the following year. The change of scenery infused new energy into his imagination, and added another dimension to his depiction of the North.

The diversity of *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* reflects a greater maturity in Service's representation of the North. The culmination of eight years in the North and personal experience of both the Mackenzie river and the Yukon, it is an artistic triumph that fulfils his personal vision of the region (*PM* 458). A notable difference is a lower degree of sensationalism in comparison with his previous collections. The dramatic scenes in "Death in the Arctic" and "While the Bannock Bakes" possess the power of those in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Ballad of Pious Pete" from his earlier collections. But in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, the ballad becomes less a chronicle of energetic drama,

and more the vehicle for a tall tale: the drama of "The Cow-Juice Cure," for example, does not compare with that in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." The phenomenon of gold-laden milk dominates, instead of a struggle with a hostile environment. In addition to the use of corny dialect, the mere inclusion of "gold bearin' cows" eliminates any prospect of serious drama (*RRS* 107), yet Service's most successful offerings here present the Arctic with a new seriousness that offers a fresh perspective on *dementia borealis*.

"Death in the Arctic" is a lengthy piece that details the fate of an expedition to the Arctic. "At eight," declares the sole survivor, "I shoot myself," but the clock ceases to work, and so too does the otherwise-invincible power of the North (*RRS* 91). Technological failure combines with the environment to render him "less than sane" (*RRS* 98): his lapses into flashbacks and a lack of awareness as to the passage of time indicate that he is in the throes of delirium. Although the North is still "a hell," its control over human affairs is not as complete as it once was (*RRS* 94). Its progress is stalled, first by the clock, then by the arrival of the rescuers. The law of the Yukon has become negotiable; an individual can control the advent of destruction by setting it to a schedule. As a result, the speaker gains a new sense of control over his situation and determines not to die.

Whereas the initial enthusiasm of ballads such as "Clancy of the Mounted Police" gives way to pathos amid final ravings, the movement in "Death in the Arctic" is more optimistic. Unless one understands the final lines of the poem to indicate the speaker's entrance into Heaven, the triumph of mere survival against the assaults of nature is an unprecedented conclusion. The Arctic is not wholly indomitable. Service's own experience, in which he proved to himself that he was able to survive a perilous journey across the Arctic's rugged terrain, was a factor in this new representation. Yet other experiences assured him that he could not wholly relinquish the theme of dementia. One incident in particular provided ample proof that the North frequently conquers humanity.

In *Ploughman of the Moon*, Service comments that "the Mackenzie was more murderous than the Yukon. Its law was harder" (425). Prior to setting out across the Great Divide, Service became acquainted with the tribute the region demanded when he accompanied a party of Mounted Policemen to a cabin containing two grotesquely decomposed bodies. Service recollects a diary at the cabin that read like one of his ballads of *dementia borealis*: The two men, trappers, developed a fierce antagonism during the winter, and one eventually shot the other and committed suicide (422-24). Confronted with the obscenity of the scene, Service shied away from further representations of such horror. His use of the ballad as a medium of tall-tales reflects a movement away from grotesque to comic narratives such as "The Cow-Juice Cure" (*RRS* 104-08) and "The Baldness of Chewed-Ear" (*RRS* 134-40). Although his own experience of the Mackenzie appealed to him for reasons other than its horrors, the influence of the North in leading people to destruction continues to fascinate him, as "Death in the Arctic" indicates, because *dementia borealis* is a factor in northern existence; as the sergeant said of the trappers, "It's the same old story" (*PM* 424).

What is new in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* is an exploration of the role of the North in determining relationships. Although "The Parson's Son" and "The Telegraph Operator" (*BC* 93-96) go mad in solitude, the black sheep who suffers the manipulations of Grubbe is part of a troublesome northern relationship. Similarly, the survivor in "Death in the Arctic" sees himself as part of a group and continually regards the anomaly of his survival in the light that mercifully does not "linger where they lie / [His comrades] who had all the luck to die" (*RRS* 93). These ballads do not elaborate on the curiosities of northern relationships. "Death in the Arctic," though it uses the group as a point of reference, focusses on the individual. In contrast, "While the Bannock Bakes" explores the combinations of men that the North draws together. *Dementia borealis* does not arise in either man, although the speaker recognizes that the discovery of gold would send him and his partner "straight to hell" (*RRS* 110), undoubtedly via the closest town.

Situated "somewhere north of Sixty-three" (*RRS* 109) -- the Arctic Circle -- the men exist in a care-free world beyond earthly concerns. The men became "Undesirables" in the South (*RRS* 110), but here they gain a new worth that reforms them into southern paradigms, "fine specimens of manhood" (*RRS* 110). Caught up in the spell of the northland, the two men become partners and live in harmony. They have rescued one another from the assaults of the North, and are freemasons of the Wild because "round the Arctic Circle friends are few and far between" (*RRS* 112). The North establishes a relationship unprecedented in their "vile" and "irresponsible" southern lives (112). The Wild fosters their relationship, and even the northern lights seem less sinister. Service contracts their Latin name, *aurora borealis*, to Rory Bory, a playful, innocent phrase. Although Service deems the broad Arctic of the Mackenzie harsher than the Klondike, the speaker affectionately refers to the ice-bound wastes as "Rory Bory Land" (*RRS* 113). The atmosphere of the ballad suggests that the North is far more idyllic than the world of *Songs of a Sourdough*.

Yet, despite the tone of 'Rory Bory,' the speaker acknowledges that the land is odd. Amid "the silence and the snow" of the North (*RRS* 115), its solitude and isolation, strange tales pass between those whom the North draws together. The darkness of the northern winter creates a privacy akin to that of the confessional box. The North, as the back of beyond, is a confessional for the southern half of the world. The speaker remarks,

> The camp-fire's a confessional -- what funny yarns we spin!
> . . . . . .
> The fig-leaf belt and Rory Bory are such odd extremes," (116)

an observation that reiterates the otherness of the North while suggesting that it offers a potential for reconciliation. The tale that emerges between these two men, the confessor unknown to the confessed, is one in which the latter wronged the former, although this only becomes clear at the end. The contents of the ballad acquire ironical power, and the relationship cemented over the course of seven years appears in danger. Yet the North

defuses the tension instead of fostering violence. When the speaker asks for his rifle at the end, a second-time reader realizes the possibilities of the situation, especially the suggestion in the italicized line, "*I've got him dead to rights*" (*RRS* 116). He can kill both the man whom his wife loved and the moose, but the harmony of the North prevents any carnage. "We've lots to eat, / I don't believe in taking life," says the speaker in the space where one expected to hear a gun-shot (*RRS* 116). The bounty and tranquillity of the North preempts his actions.

The forgiveness that takes place here, above the Arctic Circle, contrasts sharply with the North of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." There, too, someone stole a woman whose love was a lie, but when "the thought came back of an ancient wrong, . . . / . . . the lust awoke, to kill, to kill" (*SS* 53). Perhaps some form of dementia will take hold following the revelation of "the doctor chap" in "While the Bannock Bakes" (*RRS* 117), but fellowship prevails in the meantime. Startlingly, the North has brought two men together from the ends of the earth, bound them together in herself in the freemasonry of the Wild, and thereby peaceably reordered a human relationship. The North of *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* may be rooted in a harsher environment, but Service's experience of the Arctic issues in a more benevolent depiction. Terror of the North diminishes, and Service gradually replaces stories of the North's violence for themes of the beauty and wonder that foster northern patriotism. Like the god whose service is perfect freedom, the North liberates her captives rather than subjugates them.

The poet speaks from within the North rather than from without, Service's characters enjoy a unity with the North that renders them more confident in that region than in any other. Unlike Sam McGee, who longed for his southern home, the majority of characters in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* prefer the North to the South. The resulting depiction continues to entice the outsider with a sense of adventure, but with a more satisfying and integrated vision of the region. The North no longer threatens to destroy one in a fit of malice, but offers hope and a more vital life than that available in the urban

centres to the south. Instead of presenting the malignant side of *dementia borealis*, the collection gives voice to those who love the freedom that the North affords.

In "The Nostomaniac," one finds the essential Service figure -- a student of Kipling with a mania for the North. References to the "Lake of the Bear," "the Dogribs," "the Yellow-knife," and "the Arctic Barrens . . . over to Hudson's Bay" clearly identify it as the wider Arctic world of the Northwest Territories (*RRS* 59, 60, 61). Yet this North still calls with the insistency present in "The Spell of the Yukon" and "The Call of the Wild." Although it looks forward to receiving the bones of the northern adventurer, it also provides solace as a mother does to her child (*RRS* 60, 56). The land no longer resists humanity in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*; the greater number of voices in the volume echo that of the nostomaniac in their love of a welcoming land.

Opposed to the South, where the nostomaniac has "all that a man might long for," the North continues to subvert middle-class conventionality by offering satisfaction through uncertainty and adventure. "How I ache for the Northland!" exclaims the speaker, "'Dinner and servants' -- Hell!"

> What do I want with dinner? Can I eat any more?
> Can I sleep as I used to? . . . Oh, I abhor this life!
> Give me the Great Uncertain, the Barren Land for a floor,
> The Milky Way for a roof-beam, splendour and space and strife:
> Something to fight and die for. (*RRS* 59)

The comfortable life of the South is unbearable in comparison to the North, where material concerns are irrelevant. Consisting of "big things, real things, live things," the North is an idyllic land isolated from the social and moral decadence of early twentieth-century English and American society (*RRS* 59). *Dementia borealis* is now a desirable condition, freeing one from the smothering, predictable life of urban domesticity. No longer a region to fear, the North becomes a place of freedom in Service's verse. The mystery and variety of the Wild is now an attraction rather than an intimidation or a challenge.

Parallel to this revised perception of the North is a revised opinion of the South. Although it is comfortable, its cities now assume the status once held by Dawson/Klondike City. "I'm Scared of It All" embodies the new fear of the South as "too big and brutal," where "the city is deadfalled with danger and doom" (*RRS* 157). Far safer is the North between "Fort Churchill and Nome" (*RRS* 157), where the wilderness and solitude form "good habits" (not debilitating dementia) in spite of the extreme cold (*RRS* 160). The cities of the South replace the cities of the North as the moral wildernesses that destroy humanity. Counterparts to the northern wilderness, the southern cities induce an uncontrollable desire to live in the North for the sake of self-preservation. As in "The Man from Eldorado," those who surround the protagonist are characterized as animals. "Panting like dogs in a pack," they swarm around the unsuspecting visitor, isolating him from the freedom vital to his survival (*RRS* 158). Significantly, the North is a land of fulfilled hope in contrast to the ceaseless searching of the city where movement is constant and fear is pervasive. Faces are "wan," devoid of the healthy cheer that distinguish those in the North (*RRS* 158). Despite the "*hunger and woe*" of the North, it offers a far more rewarding existence than the poverty of the city that sets "the palace, the hovel next door" (*RRS* 159-60). The speaker bids the urban wilderness farewell, and affirms for the benefit of his audience the goodness of the land to which he is returning.

In "I'm Scared of It All," *dementia borealis* is far preferable to the madness of urban living, where "the fever, the fret" is "too bleeding cruel" (*RRS* 159). The speaker finds himself disoriented "in the canyons of dismal unrest" (*RRS* 158), and like the nostomaniac, prefers the uncertainty of the North to the menace of the city. Unlike the invigorating wildness of the North, the city simply destroys those who enter its canyons. Instead of providing a constructive framework wherein its residents can realize themselves, the southern cities stifle creativity and infringe on individual freedom. The distractions dismay rather than offer a refreshing alternative to solitude. A morally brutal wasteland lies outside of the North. If selected scenes from the Yukon represented the

North in Service's earlier verses, *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* offers a similarly selective view of the South.

Although references to various aboriginal peoples securely tie the fictional landscape of *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* to a specific geographic locale, the territory remains a vague, fantastic land of adventure. The *dementia borealis* depicted at the end of the collection is desirable, because it offers an escape from the regularity of urban life. Curiously, in the popular imagination this desirable image does not replace the harsh world of *Songs of a Sourdough*. Though both Service's earlier and later conceptions of the North involve an adventurous element, the earlier world of "Dan McGrew" and the sourdough who "clinched and closed with the naked North" (*SS* 32) offers greater dramatic intensity. Perhaps the novelty of the *Sourdough* collection's material also contributed to the longevity of its North over that of *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*. Although sales of Service's work indicate that the *Rhymes* fed a continuing appetite for his tales of the North, contemporary performers have drawn material for their repertoires almost exclusively from *Songs of a Sourdough* and *Ballads of a Cheechako*. The first two volumes of verse consist of ballads similar in style to the successful "McGrew" and "McGee," while Service's third collection diverges slightly from the accepted formula of dramatically intense verse. As a result, it has not been as influential in shaping the popular conception of Canada and the North.

III: The Legacy

The popular acceptance of the North as Service represented it in *Songs of a Sourdough* and *Ballads of a Cheechako* is rooted in his focus on "human life" instead of "nature . . . or classic lore" (French 6), and on the human response to particular geographical and historical circumstances. Yearly reprintings testify to the enduring appeal of his verse. In 1926 the Ryerson Press produced the forty-seventh impression of *Songs of a Sourdough*, a solid refutation of book editor Lorne Pierce's dismissive assertion in 1927 that Service's popularity had disappeared (Pierce 99). Pierce joined a tradition of scholarly disapproval of Service's work. In *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924), John Logan and Donald French cite *Songs of a Sourdough* as the beginning of a "Decadent Interim" in Canadian poetry, characterized by "poetasters and picaresque fictionists" (220, 27). Desmond Pacey perpetuated this judgment by denouncing the interim period as an "age of brass" featuring "no new writers of real significance." Instead, popular writers eschewing literary merit for "financial success" dominated the literary scene (Pacey, *Creative Writing* 86).

These critics scorn Service because he does not adhere to the Classical standards they set for him. "No pretences about Art, Inspiration, and the like for Service" (Pacey, *Creative Writing* 86-87); he deliberately violates the Homeric law that "all the elements in a work of art should each be intrinsically beautiful" (French & Logan 278). Logan and French write: "We could forgive him . . . if he had redeemed the vulgarity of the themes by beautiful craftmanship in versification. His poetry is bad . . . because it is aesthetically bad through and through" (278). In 1971, Stanley Atherton continued to take issue with Service, although he is less concerned with Service's technical skill than Service's presentation of his material. According to Atherton, Service is unable "to create a consistent and meaningful vision of man in the north" (72). Service cannot view his environment as an ordered whole: nature is both "an unwelcome reminder of . . .

mortality" and an "alluring, a compelling presence" (Atherton 72). There is no reason, however, to expect Service to reconcile these opposed perspectives. Arguably, his verse reveals the complexity of the region by recording its varied effects on people through the positive and malignant forms of *dementia borealis*.

A more recent generation of commentators hail Service as a "foundation poet" (Donnell 25) who deserves recognition on his own terms for capturing the public imagination (Johnson, "Age of Brass" 14). For Pacey, the writers in "the age of brass" had no real ability and achieved success through the "spiritual and cultural" depravity of their readers: "The only writers whom they would read were those who could sell their wares in the hundreds of thousands" (Pacey, "Service and MacInnes" 12). Current assessments credit these writers with success in their own right, however. For David Donnell, Service ranks "as the first English Canadian Foundation Poet. . . . [who] wrote, in many ways, about this national character we talk about, this character we say is Canadian" (25). Like his Australian counterparts A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson, Service lies "at the very foundation of a national tradition" (Donnell 25). Service successfully mythologizes a part of Canada for his readers; as several contemporary performers of Service's work comment, his chief appeal lies in an ability to tell a captivating tale (Parry, 28 Apr. 1994).[2]

The appropriation of his style and metrics by numerous imitators confirms the potential of his verse to capture the imagination with a well-expressed story. V. B. Rhodenhizer cites Robert Stead as Service's foremost imitator, both for the popular metre of his verse and the subject matter he chose (231). Stead employs and imitates several of Service's metres, as in the title selection of *The Empire Builders and Other Poems*. Like "The Law of the Yukon," the voice of a region addresses the reader with a solemnity that appears quite trite in light of Kipling's and Service's work:

> Said the West to the East of a nation,
> "The fruit of your loins am I,

And I claim no other birthright
  And I own no other tie
But the bond that is fixed between us,
  And the blood that is yours and mine --
Yet nurture the child that is born you,
  Ere other arms entwine." (Stead 11)

Stead reflects the imperialistic sensibility of Kipling rather than the individualistic vigour of Service's verse. Stead cannot point towards the fringes of the country without remaining conscious of a duty to the eastern home left behind; unlike Service, he recognizes "that for every 'out west' there is a 'back east'" (Stouffer 63). He remains conscious of the links between East and West, the homeland and the new land. Service's verse reflects broken bonds, but Stead honours "the bond that is fixed." Stead's poetry is weaker as a result, because he does not markedly develop his verse beyond that of Kipling's and Service's models. Whereas Service offered the apology that in spite of imitating other poets, his material was entirely his own (*PM* 458), the echoes of the older poets overwhelm Stead's representation of the prairie. Furthermore, his verse appeared in 1908 and merely capitalized on the novelty of Service's, never achieving the same degree of success.

In addition to Stead, a host of lesser versifiers adopted Service's style to express their conception of Canada's northwestern frontier. The rector of the Whitehorse church that Service attended, the Rev. H. A. Cody, is notable because he was a personal friend of Service (Jones 125). Following the publication of *Songs of a Sourdough*, the two men cultivated a closer friendship and regularly discussed their literary endeavours. Service benefitted from Cody's knowledge of the Yukon's early history, while Cody enjoyed their discussions of literary matters (Jones 126). In Cody's ballad "The Lilt of the Northland," published in 1925, a Kiplingesque sensibility that envisions the eventual triumph of humanity predominates, but the North speaks with an intensity and epic consciousness that reflects Service's influence:

Creeping through wild rolling low-lands, pulsing through stark
  solitudes,
Clanging through grim flinty canyons, snarling in rapids' wild

moods.
These are my untamed rivers, these for the untamed men,
Anaks who know not the kennel, who know not the brothel
or "Pen;"
Suckled by Spartan-like mothers, reared to the strains of great
themes,
These are the men I am calling, calling to harness my streams.
(Cody 17)

The contrast with Service's "The Law of the Yukon" is clear. Cody's virtuous, "untamed" adventurers are unimpeded in their encounter with the North. Their virtue, unlike that of the parson's son, remains unsullied as they harness and subjugate a land "calling and waiting" (Cody 18). The envisioned conflict is a non-event. In contrast, Service's Yukon briskly beckons untamed men, who, unlike in Cody's ballad, are no match for the North.

Service's verse captures the Canadian imagination because it parallels the adventurous spirit of Kipling's while remaining faithful to the Canadian frontier experience of struggle with hostile natural forces. Service records "something we recognize as our own" (Phelps 34) that allows readers to see themselves both in an exotic, adventurous light, and with an irony that fosters self-awareness. Service introduces readers to Canada through the selective scenes of his Yukon verse, with the result that Canadian readers in particular recognize their identity as fundamentally northern (Stouffer 56). The North is the purest embodiment of Canada because it contains the essential "big things, real things, live things" that Canadians confront while establishing themselves in the northwest (*RRS* 59). Readers with a British or American perspective, though removed from the experience of the northern frontier, realize that Canada is not simply "the big, broad land 'way up yonder" (*SS* 24), but a place of mythical proportions where the imperial glory of "lazar London" pales (*SS* 74). The North makes readers aware of their own position in the world, forcing them to confront a radically different set of circumstances that removes them from their own situations. The reduction of people to "drivelling feebly of home" and "seeking a drunkard's solace" reminds readers of a larger, more complex world that demands their attention (*SS* 13). Kipling's Lady of the Snows asserts her identity

"soberly" (*RKV* 183), but Service's Yukon brutally enforces her law, scorning those who "[make] a bawd of [her] bounty" (*SS* 16). The product of an emigrant to Canada, Service's writing also allowed fellow emigrants to experience the North with a sense of wonder, just as he once travelled in the wake of Stevenson and the trail of Roberts.

Service's success as a popular writer created a cultural legacy that continues to find expression in music, drama, art, and folklore. Technological accomplishments may have rendered the North -- and Canada -- less intimidating and severe, but many people within and without the country still entertain a notion of the land lying above the forty-ninth parallel as a vast frontier wilderness. Anyone who has worked in the Canadian tourist industry can confirm the abundant misperceptions Americans and others hold as to the nature of the country. And despite modern conveniences, Canadians themselves still delight in discussing the weather. No matter where one goes in the country during the winter, there are complaints about the severity of typical winter weather -- snow, ice, cold, storms -- and a longing for the South. As if biologically engineered into the Canadian consciousness, reports of contemporary cabin fever, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), or any other malady attributable to the northern climate, surface across the nation in the bleak mid-winter of February. In some regions, such as north of the sixtieth parallel, these seasonal afflictions are wholly understandable, but in others, reports of their occurrence are purely a function of the myth of northernness perpetrated in Service's verse. In southern Canada, cabin fever becomes a stated reason for winter carnivals, an advertising gimmick, and a pretense for complaints about winter. It is a cause of communal activity rather than violence or delusions such as Pious Pete suffers.

On the whole, contemporary circumstances do not confine or isolate individuals as the winter does Pious Pete and Sam Noot. Scurvy no longer compounds the woes of winter, nor is isolation in a snow-bound wilderness a common factor in contemporary cases of SAD. The cold may annoy some, but the existence of enclosed walkways and other conveniences in most urban centres alleviates the stress and discomfort of the

winter. Any inconvenience that Canadians experience does not generally result in a barroom shooting, as in "Dan McGrew," nor in the derangement that strikes the speaker in "Sunshine" (*RRS* 32-42). Bereft of his wife in the Arctic on Christmas day, the speaker keeps her corpse in his cabin for companionship until the sun returns in spring. Her corpse often seems alive to him while he awaits the return of the sun. His imaginings become more frequent and realistic as the days pass, but he is powerless to resist the charm of the madness overtaking him. Such behaviour is uncommon among Canadian widowers and widows when their spouses die in the middle of winter! Civilization has progressed such that classic cases of destructive *dementia borealis* do not seize the country every year, although the ravings of tourists in the summer suggest that the Canadian scenery may induce the benign variety.[3]

Service also entered the American imagination as a writer of their North by virtue of the vague location the Yukon occupied for many readers (Bucco 16). The Alaska boundary crisis of 1898, sparked by the influx of prospectors to the Klondike goldfields, highlights the sense in America that the Klondike was in Alaska rather than Canada. A lesser discovery of gold at Nome, Alaska, in 1899 lured away much of Dawson's population (Berton, *Klondike* 392) and added to the confusion surrounding the location of Service's ballads. These circumstances conveniently allowed Service's work to permeate the popular imagination in the United States, but the frontier violence of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" also contributed to its American appeal. Of all his ballads, it is one of the most widely recognized, and has thereby allowed Service to establish an enduring image of the North.

One of the earliest adaptations that contributed to the popular image of the North as depicted in "McGrew" was the 1915 movie directed by Herbert Blache and the accompanying novel by Marvin Dana. It sets the story squarely in Alaska, relegating Canada to a place of refuge from the forces of American justice. The movie depicts an American frontier, featuring mob justice and gun-fights, elements virtually unknown

during the Klondike gold rush (*Klondike* xviii-xx). By appropriating the tale to an American context, the movie represents the Klondike, and consequently the North, as a violent place. It preserves the emphasis on adventure that initially allowed the ballad to capture the popular imagination, but its heightened violence substitutes a pseudo-Canadian North for the true North. Notably, in a version of "McGrew" produced at the Charlottetown Festival in 1993, Constable Clancy of the Mounted Police interrupts the cast as they arrive in Dawson to correct their belief that the city is in the States (Betts & Bertram 19). His presence not only reminds the audience of the law and order prevailing during the gold rush, but attaches a geographic reality to the names.

The movie increases the violence of the original ballad through additional characters. The significance of the stranger's piano playing, central to the drama of the original story, lacks a narrator to describe its effects. The movie represents the stranger's relationship with "the Great Alone" physically rather than musically, through his adoption of a hermit's lifestyle. The stranger, known as Jim Maxwell, is a kind man dramatically altered by the destruction of domestic happiness. The movie transfers the violence of his psychological experience to explicit violence against Jack Reeves, who becomes his son-in-law. McGrew murders a rich prospector, and has Jack arrested for the crime, but Jack sets fire to his jail cell and dramatically escapes the material prison that parallels the "bars" of the northern lights above Jim (*SS* 52). The wronged characters eventually converge at the shoot-out in the Malamute saloon.

Yet the North neither prompts nor aggravates this violence. For Jim, the region is a source of comfort. "When he found himself isolated there in a cabin amid the loneliness of this land, [he] almost forgot vengeance . . . in the immensity of the peace that brooded over the snow-clad wastes" (Dana 166). This is the peace identified in "The Spell of the Yukon." Unlike its effect on the speaker in the original, the wilderness does not awaken in Jim a hunger "for a home and all that it means" (*SS* 52). Indeed, he becomes aware of his loss only when a daughter, Nell, and other characters from his domestic tragedy

reappear. McGrew's seduction of Lou outrages Jim, and the mixture of grief, hate, and love that it inspires causes Jim to lose control of himself (Dana 285). The North itself does not prompt the violence that Jim and Jack experience. This portrayal reflects the benevolent North that provides refuge to characters in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, such as Tom Thorne. Like Jim, Tom flies "afar for the thing called Peace," seeking an escape from an enigmatic "*her*" (*RRS* 68).

Insofar as Dana tends towards the benevolent vision in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, he rejects the stark context established for the story in *Songs of a Sourdough* in favour of an interpretation of the North coherent with Service's entire poetic output. The northern lights appear in tandem with the Fates that draw the various characters of the novel northwards to the final resolution of their conflicts (Dana 154). As in "While the Bannock Bakes," the North fosters a constructive reordering of relationships, drawing together odd or unsuspecting conglomerates of people. One never knows into whom one will run. Neither Nell nor her father expect to meet each other, nor do they expect to find Lou. And Jim certainly does not expect to exact his revenge on McGrew in such a place. The appeal of the North lies not in the challenge it presents to human stamina, but in the exotic setting it supplies for adventure, and the association of its environment with the extraordinary.

The shooting of Dan McGrew rapidly gained acceptance as an actual event. Pierre Berton names veterans of the Klondike who claimed to have both known McGrew and witnessed his death (*Just Add Water* 38-39). Perhaps the most notable of McGrew's acquaintances was Mike Mahoney, a sourdough of legendary status who eventually left the Klondike and entertained audiences throughout Canada and the United States with his first-hand tales of adventure. Bowing gracefully to public demands for the facts concerning McGrew, he dated the shooting in the winter of 1904. When a reporter read a letter from Service to the International Sourdough's Association in 1937, informing them that the entire event was fictional, those present protested in favour of Mahoney, who was

their president at the time (Denison 391-93). Mahoney did not contradict the letter, but the audience demanded him to tell them the story they had come to accept as truth. Legend had become reality for the sourdoughs. Enshrining the shooting as historical fact affirmed the sourdoughs' nostalgic ties with a North they chose to remember as one of high adventure. Like Service's nostomaniac, the sourdoughs treasured the invigorating life they had experienced in the upper latitudes. For the inhabitants of the High North, hardship is "lost in the limbo" of forgetfulness; all that remains is "the guerdon and gain . . . / Zest of the foray, and God, how you fought" (*BC* 12)! The enduring characteristic of the North is its challenge to humanity, rather than any natural phenomenon such as the cold or the northern lights.

Parodies also testify to the enduring appeal of Service's verse. "Dan McGrew" offered Allied servicemen during the Second World War a suitable vehicle for their own imaginative outpourings. A "1940 Version of the Shooting of Dan McGrew," written by a Canadian, features various facist leaders:

> A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Kaiserhof Hotel.
> Hitler and Himmler the Gestapo Chief were paving the road to Hell
> Back of the bar, with his medals on, was Goering that hunk of cheese
> While poor old Hess in a hell of a mess, was searching himself for fleas.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then all of a sudden the lights went out, and outside was heard a roar,
> The lights came on, and who do you think was standing at the door,
> It was Mussy the Duce, the Dago's pride, and stupid as a mule:
> While clutching his hand was his son-in-law, Ciano, the simpering fool.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He stumbled and staggered across the room, then fell in a heap on the floor,
> As a string of bombs from the R. A. F. burst just outside the door,
> Those are [the] simple facts of the case . . . and strictly between you and I,
> To conquer the world you've the British to beat, so you needn't even try.

The parody both entertains its audience, and uses familiarity with Service's narrative to bolster confidence in eventual victory. Another, bawdy, parody that enjoyed wide dissemination among British, Canadian, and American servicemen defused the social concerns of its audience while retaining the Yukon setting (Haley). In addition to addressing fears of venereal disease, the parody parallels that of the notorious naval song "Good Ship Venus," which battles the threat of homosexuality "by pushing it to the foreground of people's attention, thereby reducing its potential force" (Hopkins 58). The stranger from the creeks sodomizes McGrew, and like the vanquishing of Hitler and his fellows in the previous example, the event both entertains the audience and diverts attention from immediate concerns. In the first parody, the war is won; in the second, the fear of homosexual behaviour in the armed forces is mocked. Each accomplishes its purpose through an entertaining, if ribald, narrative.

"Dan McGrew" also serves as the basis for a parody among the colliers in the West Riding of Yorkshire, documented in the *Southern Folklore Quarterly*. The successful transfer of Service's ballad to a completely different environment reveals the versatility of his narrative. The Yorkshire parody applies Service's reference to the night that "was fifty below" to the depth of a coal pit, yards replacing degrees Farenheit as the unit of measurement (Green 185). The parody reinterprets the original ballad in terms of its audience's environment, thereby renewing the narrative's lease of life. Similarly, Jim Betts and John Bertram chose to produce "Dan McGrew" as a play because the original ballad "immortalized" a "boisterous, colourful, and dangerous Dawson City" (Betts & Bertram iv). Their play humorously reflects the discrepancy between myth and reality that has accumulated around "Dan McGrew" and the North as a result of Service's work. The play appeals because of its foundation on an aggressive and energetic narrative, qualities that a full cast highlighted in its execution of the choreography, music, and script at the 1993 Charlottetown Festival.

The reviewer in Charlottetown praised the "very solid cast" for effectively presenting "bright, colorful and energetic characters" in a show featuring "several wonderful songs . . . and some great little dance numbers" (Gallant 3). A "jaunty travelling theme" accompanies the cast as it sets the mood with the song "Dawson City."

MEN: Gotta sail on up the Yukon River,
Paydirt's waitin' fer us to find it.
We're gonna make 'bout a million-plus!
WOMEN: Million-plus --
ALL: Million-plus --
WOMEN: And they'll end up spending it all on us!

Down in Dawson City,
They'll need some comfort when the nights get cold.
So in Dawson City,
We'll strike gold! (Bertram & Betts 5-6)

This energetic exchange between the men and women as the play opens characterizes the whole production, and sets a humorous tone for the relationship between McGrew, Lou, and the stranger from the creeks, known here as Dan's brother Jack. The exuberance of the song draws the audience along with the cast to the setting of Dawson City, engaging it in the play's action from the start. The enthusiasm of the opening scenes culminates in the second part of "Dawson City" when the cast proclaims its arrival in the

Smack-dab centre of Utopia.
. . . . . .
. . . Dawson City,
Ca . . . na . . . da!!! (Bertram & Betts 19)

The extended delivery of 'Canada,' emphasized by three exclamation points, establishes the "boisterous" character of a narrative that aggressively engages an audience seeking entertainment in a story that has become part of its national heritage. "There's no doubt the gold [that the festival's directors seek] is there" claims the reviewer, " . . . the festival's newest main stage musical transports audiences back in time . . . to one of the most exciting periods in this nation's history" (Gallant 3). Yet part of the excitement also arises from the exuberance of the theatrical production of Service's ballad. Both the play and the

ballad capitalize on the image of the Klondike as a frontier region, and the success of the musical comedy by Bertram and Betts testifies to the enduring appeal of the legend Service created.

Significantly, these parodies and adaptations fulfil Service's determination to write verse "the fellow in a pub would quote" (*PM* 458). In the hands of his readership, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" has become that, and more. Service's ballads are appealing because they subvert the myth of the North even as they perpetuate its harsh reputation. Instead of having a strictly literary intent, they allow his audience to laugh at its predicament. His verse not only exists on the printed page, but also enters the lives of readers who appreciate the blend of humour with the stark landscape Service depicts. "The Cremation of Sam McGee," for example, pokes fun at the conventional images associated with the North, and at the culture that supports them. The hardy prospector devolves into the whimpering Sam McGee (Hirsch 137), and a somewhat ludicrous search for a fitting crematorium undermines the seriousness of the trail's "stern code" (*SS* 57). The ideal confronts reality, and the result is bathetic. Similarly, David Bentley suggests that the long lines of Service's ballads visibly oppose the desolation of the North that induces *dementia borealis* (61). Instead of short lines that appear overwhelmed by the white, snow-like expanse of the page, the lines confront barrenness with a vigour and vitality grounded in the hilarity of their content. Behind the sober ideal of virile confrontation lies an ebullient cheer.

Humour in Service's ballads partly arises from ironic circumstances that also contribute to *dementia borealis*. Irony stems from the reversal of characters' expectations of the North, and this reversal undermines the order of society by exposing "the discrepancy between the ideal . . . and the [actuality]" (Dopp 42). It also "opens up new spaces . . . where new things can happen" (Hutcheon 31). Although Linda Hutcheon sees these two functions as distinct, they often mingle in Service's verse. His North is fraught with dangers for the unwary, but the frequent discord between expectation and reality that

jars the characters also creates new possibilities for them. In "While the Bannock Bakes," the North reverses the former antagonism of two men, binding them together "by all the Wild's freemasonry" (*RRS* 112). The North ambushes both men, each saving the other from the clutches of the wilderness, whereas in the South they would gladly have let each other perish. The reversal lies first in their humbling, personal encounters with the North, and second, in the new relationship with each other that their common experience affords. The irony of their situation permits their survival rather than defeat. Such reversals are the "pay-off" that give Service's ballads their appeal (*PM* 88).

Armed with good humour, Service confronts the moral problems besetting Canada as the country emerged from the Victorian era into modernity. But unlike E. J. Pratt, who seeks an imaginative resolution to the moral concerns that the conflict between the "impersonal cruelty in nature" and a technologically-empowered humanity raises, Service is content to merely tell the story of the confrontation (Dudek 131). Both Pratt and Service document adventurous incidents, but the sobriety of the conclusion to Pratt's poem "The Ice-Floes" precludes any interpretation of the piece as mere verse for recitation. The concluding lines of Pratt's poem crystallize the problem of encountering the North, summarizing the poem as being

> Of twenty thousand seals that were killed
> . . . . . .
> . . . at our count of sixty dead." (145, 148)

Pratt, unlike Service, questions the reasons underlying the death of his characters. His verse leaves one pondering the relative value of seals and men, questioning whether the harvest of seals is worth the human sacrifice to nature. In contrast, Service does not provoke thought as to the value of Sam's death or the suffering his departure for the North occasioned. "Why he left his home in the South to roam round the Pole God only knows" (*SS* 55). Service eschews the weightier questions of suffering and death in favour of the entertainment derived from Sam's cremation.

"The Cremation of Sam McGee" is essentially a joke, and part of its humour arises from the perpetual complaint McGee makes against the cold. He subverts the image of the rugged northern prospector, thereby obtaining sympathy from an audience that probably fears the cold itself. "We all sympathize with the Tennessean who had at last got warm," comments Lewis Horning (298). Sam's unexpected triumph also belongs to his audience, whose terror of the North diminishes as it laughs at the practical joke Sam plays on the environment. His ebullient triumph is perhaps the reason that many dramatized versions of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," such as that by Betts and Bertram, feature a happy conclusion. The victory of the maddened or wronged party, victimized by the North, must occur in order to satisfy a pleasure-seeking audience. The enigmatic resolution to the original "McGrew" is not unfulfilling, but the humour that Betts and Bertram infuse into their production leads to a conclusion that does not disquiet the audience in the same manner as the original. In contrast, "Sam McGee" possesses a joyous finale that revels in life.

The work of contemporary artists reflects the continued appeal of Service's interpretation of the North's severity. The song "Canol Road," by the late Canadian songwriter Stan Rogers, takes as its central image a road built in the frenzy of northern construction during the Second World War, a period as significant to the Yukon as the Klondike gold rush. Today, the road inauspiciously begins at Johnson's Crossing south of Whitehorse and continues north through the wilderness for 222 kilometres to Ross River. It is now little more than a hiking trail. Like "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," Rogers' song focusses on a barroom incident propelled by *dementia borealis*. Although the love of a woman is absent from Rogers' sequence of events, the drama of the North's control over and destruction of the central character holds the audience's attention. Rogers embraces and develops Service's wider vision of the North as a region that not only promises adventure, but displays might and majesty. The North inspires awe at its wildness, present both in the bush and in town.

"Canol Road" employs several elements from Service's verse. Rogers' ballad expresses little wonder at the role of the North in human affairs; the effects of the climate and landscape are taken for granted. Service frequently reminds his readers of the northern winter's extreme cold: in "Sam McGee" it stabs "like a driven nail" (*SS* 56), while "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill" specifies a temperature of "sixty-nine below" (*BC* 47).[4] Rogers, however, relegates the detail of temperature to his song's refrain where it intimates the narrative's conclusion rather than being integral to the development of the story. The landscape itself only appears as a distinct character in the third stanza, the audience having accepted its adversarial role implicitly from the start. Although the protagonist drives to town in a desperate attempt to escape cabin fever, a direct confrontation with his environment only occurs along the Canol road.

As in Service, the northern lights preside with divine grandeur in Rogers' song while the Yukon achieves victory over another weak and foolish human. They seem to mock human folly, their "neon" tone suggesting the neon lights of the tavern where the man's dementia manifested itself (Rogers 106). Characteristically, cold claims the man, and the repetition of "Yukon" to modify "wind" and "winter" in the last stanza indicates that the death was not a chance result of the man's desperate flight up the impassable Canol road, but the inevitable conclusion of his gamble against the northern winter. The physical symptoms that he exhibited in the opening stanza now echo in the manifestations of the cold's triumph:

> Well, you could see it in his eyes as they strained against the night,
> And the bone-white knuckled grip upon the road.
> Sixty-five miles into town, and a winter's thirst to drown
> A winter still with two months left to go.
> His eyes are too far open, and his grin too hard and sore,
> His shoulders too far high to bring relief,
> But the Kopper King is hot, even if the band is not,
> And it sure beats shooting whiskey jacks and trees.

. . . . . .

> Well, it's God's own neon green above the mountains here tonight,
> Throwing brittle, coloured shadows on the snow.
> It's four more hours til dawn, and the gas is almost gone,
> And that bitter Yukon wind begins to blow.
> Now you can see it in his eyes as they glitter in the light,
> And the bone-white rime of frost around his brow.
> To late the dawn has come; that Yukon winter's won,
> And he's got his cure for cabin fever now. (Rogers 104-06)[5]

The North pursues the man relentlessly, intensifying his dementia from simple mental strain in the bush to uncontrollable passion at the Kopper King tavern, and finally, physical collapse up the Canol road. As in Service's most satisfying ballads, the North asserts complete dominance over her chosen ones.

In the middle of "a winter still with two months left to go" he begins to manifest physical indications of tension and stress (Rogers 104). His manner signals the onset of *dementia borealis*, from which there is no escape: "his shoulders [are] too far high to bring relief" as he leaves to seek comfort in Whitehorse (Rogers 105). His sole diversion outside of town is shooting his companions, the "whiskey jacks and trees" (105), and *dementia borealis* ensures that he continues to assault his acquaintances in Whitehorse: "When he's finished, there's a dead man on the floor" (106). The town is as much a wilderness as the bush, and emphasizes the inescapable nature of his predicament. The parallel between the coldness of the band at the Kopper King and the understood coldness of the winter subtly reiterates the similarity between the climate of the society in which he seeks refuge and the isolation from which he comes. The man laughs at the North nevertheless, and proclaims with the boldness of a man from Eldorado or a Constable Clancy, "It didn't get me this time! Not tonight! / I wasn't screaming when I hit the door" (Rogers 106)!

Like Service's characters, his actions soon give the lie to his boast. He descends to the level of a beast, surrounded not by the buzzards that flocked around the man from Eldorado, but by "hungry dogs." "Now he's a bear in a blood-red mackinaw with hungry dogs at bay, / And spring-time thunder in his sudden roar" (106). He is clearly part of the

northern environment in the same manner as the man from the creeks in "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." Both characters convey the power of the north, one through music, the other through his rage. Yet while Service's protagonists are generally victims of their environment, here the protagonist is a vehicle for the fury of the North. Through him, it lashes out at others. The buzzards may have had their feast in "The Man from Eldorado," but the hungry dogs remain at bay in "Canol Road." Although one may reasonably interpret the song as a slow, mournful piece lamenting the circumstances that induce the violence of *dementia borealis*, Rogers' own fast-paced, lively rendition emphasizes the intensity of the action. Although the audience develops little sympathy for the murderer, he is clearly a classic victim of *dementia borealis*. The undefined "it" that he claims to have escaped is the North, the Yukon winter that triumphs in the final stanza.

Both Service and Rogers use the long ballad line that, according to Bentley, expresses defiance of the North. Although the length of Rogers' lines is less obvious due to the typography in his book, the defiant spirit of "Canol Road" as Rogers sings it on the album *Northwest Passage* lends credence to Bentley's theory. Comparable defiance informs the title song of *Northwest Passage*. Rogers reinvents the North and its dead as ghosts haunting the Canadian imagination, placing Franklin parallel, yet at a distance from, contemporary experience (Grace). The speaker in Rogers' "Northwest Passage" seeks "the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea" as it traces "one warm line through a land so wild and savage" (Rogers 86). The pursuit of Franklin involves a danger with which the "warm line" contends, and Grace suggests that Rogers' vision of the North seeks reassurance in the face of the region's power. Warmth contends against northern frigidity, a determined line against geographic infinitude. As part of the *Northwest Passage* recording, "Canol Road" shares in this attempt to reassure its audience against the assaults of the North, and thereby continues the barricade that Service's line lengths raised.

In confronting the North, Service challenges it both implicitly through technical devices, and explicitly with humour. Canadian performer Stompin' Tom Connors' song "The Night That I Cremated Sam McGee" (*Story* 145) suitably expresses the exuberance present in many of Service's ballads. Although he perpetuates Service's representation of the North as a cold, forbidding land where heroism consists in victory over the environment, technology facilitates human triumph. "The northern gentleman" heroically "braves the winter through," confronting "the boundless snows where none dare go," but "he drives a crane and he stakes a claim, and he works at the old pulp mill" (*Story* 146). The crane and the pulp mill give the northern gentleman a strength that the lowly prospector lacks. Unlike Service's Yukon, Connors' North seldom vanquishes those who seek to obtain its riches.

Yet Connors' song "Marten Hartwell Story," relating the events surrounding a plane crash that occurred in the Northwest Territories in November 1972, proclaims the strength of the North. This event brought the perils of the North to the fore of the public imagination, much as the 1991 crash of a Hercules military transport plane did for the current decade. Hartwell's plane crashes, in part, "because the wind it blew and the storm it grew and the signal of Contwoyta they missed by miles . . ." (*Story* 114). As in several of Service's ballads, the North isolates the passengers from the rest of the world, and when the plane crashes they face not only the dangers of the climate but the additional complication of being lost. Connors announces, in an echoing voice that conveys the desolation and emptiness surrounding Hartwell and his passengers, that they are "Lost, up in no-man's land of the Northwest Territories" (*To It and At It*). Hartwell nearly becomes another name, such as 'Franklin,' on the list of adventurers swallowed in the northern wilderness. Yet technology, in the form of Hartwell's radio signal, represents "one warm line" that ultimately fends off the wilderness and saves Hartwell. Like Service, Connors is a story-teller, and it is perhaps unrealistic to expect him to choose material for his songs that do not appeal to the public. For Canadians, this means the triumph of humanity over

nature. Connors sings of survival, and thereby reassures his audience against the assaults of the North. *Dementia borealis* does not affect his characters because he concentrates on their success against the environment, rather than the reverse. The North exacts a tribute, but its failure to fully subjugate humanity reassures Connors' southern audience.

The failure of the North contributes to the appeal of "Sam McGee" that convinced Connors to include a rendition of it in his repertoire. Embracing a contemporary style faithful to that of the original, the song rewrites Service's ballad with an emphasis on the narrator's surprise. A moderately fast tempo, devoid of the defiance that characterizes the performance of "Canol Road," conveys the light-hearted attitude that the ballad encourages. Connors' need to make Service's ballad "a song of standard length" truncates the original by five stanzas and leads to a stronger personal voice that focusses attention on the conclusion (Connors, Letter). The narrator immediately identifies McGee as "my pal" (Connors, *Story* 145), in contrast with Service's more impersonal "now Sam McGee was from Tennessee" (*SS* 55). Following Sam's death, the scene immediately shifts to the marge of Lake Lebarge, maintaining the focus on the narrator's actions by forgoing the lengthy descriptive passage that Service includes (*SS* 57-58). This focus on the narrator propels the ballad to its conclusion.

Connors' diction contributes to the hilarity of the ballad. The line, "Soon the blazin' furnace red, seemed that old McGee was dead, so I stuffed him in that old crematin' hole" (*Story* 145), typifies the nonchalance of the speaker and dramatically sets off his surprise at finding "old McGee" alive in a resurrected body. While an American version by Kirt Kempter employs a melody that focusses on the ghostly and extraordinary nature of the event, Connors, as a Canadian, stresses the humour arising from Sam outwitting the North. For the American, the North is a place of adventure, "queer sights," and "strange things;" to the Canadian it is the reality of a winter that demands a sense of humour in order to survive. Laughter ensures survival by helping one to cope and keep matters in perspective. For Connors, the ballad focusses on McGee's response to the northern

climate and the effect it has on Cap. The benefit of the joke played on the North passes to the audience, which shares in Cap's surprise at Sam's reversed attitude towards death from the cold. Cold in life, Sam escapes into the "cool and calm" serenity of death, where Cap is the first to hear the delightful news of the refreshing change that destroys the dominance of the North. This, of course, occurs in Service's original as well, because Connors' alterations maintain the integrity of the original. The inclusion of Service's ballad in his repertoire indicates its continued appeal to Canadians, who mock their circumstances as a means of confronting them.

Marten Hartwell crashed in the same year as Atwood published *Survival*. The fascination that adventures of survival in the severe conditions of the Canadian environment regularly attract suggests that "survival" is the typically Canadian adventure. Just as the wild West holds a fascination for Americans, Canadians realize themselves in their conflicts with the northern environment. Service's attention continued to focus on the reaction of people to their situations following his departure from North America in 1912. If the environment of the North shapes the characters of Service's northern ballads, the events of war have no less an effect on the man from Athabaska in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*. Service's reputation rests on "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee," but his later ballads match the success and appeal of these earlier works through their vivacity. Although Service fancied that his grave-digger might gripe, "'That guy wrote McGrew; / 'Twas the best he could do'" (*SSL* 56), Wallace Lockhart emphasizes that "we have got to stop thinking about Service as a Yukon poet. His message thrills the marrow of those with an ounce of adventure, those who remember war, those who love France, those who adore the simple (yet great) things of life be it friendship or an old banjo" (Letter). Service's entire poetic output reveals a broader personality than that behind *Songs of a Sourdough* or *Ballads of a Cheechako*. The fact that the entire three volumes of his collected verse are now only available through his British publisher indicates the enduring appeal he possesses beyond North America.

One of the best volumes of Service's selected verse to appear in recent years is *Dan McGrew, Sam McGee, and Other Great Service* (1987), first published in the United States. McGraw-Hill Ryerson of Toronto now carries it in Canada, but its American origin illustrates the persistent American influence over the publication of Service's work and also dismisses the greater part of Service's later verse. The collection characterizes Service as a northern writer, praising him for his "witness to the wild" (ix) while denigrating "Sourdough Star," published shortly before his death, as "pretty awful stuff" (xv). This assessment may be true, but the comment also discredits the bulk of Service's later work as generally unappealing. The collection implicitly dismisses the verse Service published following *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* through the exclusion of all but four of his later poems. The illustrations accompanying the ballads that do appear reveal how contemporary Service's earlier work is. Making effective use of light and shadow, the artist does not bind Service's work to a dated or specifically Klondike setting; he graces the art with an ambiguity that allows for a freedom of interpretation. The illustration for "The Harpy," for instance, faithfully interprets the poem through the figure of a common hooker in contemporary attire, rather than a dance-hall girl in Klondike costume. She appears as "unhallowed and unshriven" as the woman Service describes, lurking in the alley-way of a modern city (*SS* 39).

Despite the dearth of later material, this collection of "great Service" moves beyond Service's identification with "McGrew" and "McGee." It reacquaints readers with the diverse contents of his early volumes, notably *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*. Enthusiastically received in both North America and Great Britain when it first appeared -- it allowed Service to "become by undisputed right the laureate of the B[ritish] E[xpeditionary] F[orce]" (Horning 295), and remained at the top of American best-seller lists for nine months (*HH* 77) -- the battlefront ballads in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* gain new currency as an integral part of the Service canon defined in the collection. Unfortunately, the neglect of later material deprives the reader of the hearty humour

Service displayed in his later verse. Without this added perspective, one gains the sense that Service only witnessed to the wilderness of the forest and battlefront rather than to the joys of domestic and civilized life.

The touchstone for most audiences that encounter Service will likely remain his Yukon ballads. Yet as David Parry ably proves with his 1993 recording *The Man From Eldorado*, the northern ballads seamlessly connect with verse from other points in Service's career. On an earlier recording, *The Wind That Tramps the World*, Parry offered a musical setting of "The Sourdough's Lament" from *Later Collected Verse* (444), revealing that some of Service's later material is as appealing as his earlier. *The Man From Eldorado* presents two pieces from *Later Collected Verse*, as well as several from *Ballads of a Bohemian* and *Bar-Room Ballads* (1940) that refute the notion that Service's later material was generally "pretty awful stuff." In spite of the title that capitalizes on Service's association with the Yukon, only four of the eleven selections on the recording appear in Service's first three volumes of verse. Parry recognizes that Service lived in Europe following his stint in the Yukon.

Perhaps the sharpest departure from the conventional image of Service is "In Praise of Alcohol," "a little gem," Parry declares, "written towards the end of a long life filled with the obvious enjoyment of such pleasures." "With praise I'll raise the ruby cup," crows the ballad's speaker, and "like a jolly monk / Proceed to get sublimely drunk" (*LCV* 421). For this narrator, unlike the "restless ones" depicted in *Songs of a Sourdough*, liquor is a source of exultation, not one of "the excitements and excesses that are banned" (*SS* 93). Wine fuels the flicker of life's flame in *Later Collected Verse*, rather than the rebellious spirit that leads the characters in Service's first book to seek destruction in the wilderness. The tone is mirthful rather than stern. Indeed, Parry emphasizes Service's zest for life throughout his recording. "The *Petit Vieux*" from *Ballads of a Bohemian* advises the reader "Sow your nice tame oats and then [at the age of seventy] . . . Hi, boys! Let 'er rip" (120). Similarly, the gravity of Service's war experiences are undercut by the *bon*

vivant revelry of "A Pot of Tea.' A lively measure expressing the glory of a "nectar that's a flavour of Oolong" (*RRCM* 127) undercuts the brief prose passage from *Ballads of a Bohemian* detailing the exhausting shifts, "trying" weather, and "lousy" sleeping conditions of a war-time ambulance driver (*BB* 191):

> You're awful cold and dirty, and a-cursing of your lot;
> You scoff the blushin' 'alf of it, so rich and ripping hot;
> It bucks you up like anythink, just seems to touch the spot:
> God bless the man that first discovered Tea. (*RRCM* 126)

The cheerful spirit that characterizes this speaker is typical of Service's characters who find a life in the repertoires of contemporary performers. Their promotion of good humour and a relaxed lifestyle secures their continued appeal. Though it lacks the adventure of his earlier ballads, the verse of Service's seniority emphasizes a philosophy that savours life instead of consuming it in worry or dementia. Characters embrace the joy and humour of their situations just as the true sourdoughs accept the varying conditions of the North. In short, they are ruggedly optimistic.

Grandpapa in "The Three Bares," from *Songs of a Sun-Lover* (1949), exemplifies the rugged optimism of Service's characters. Bluegrass performer Debby McClatchy includes a musical setting of the poem in her repertoire, alongside "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill" and "The Spell of the Yukon." Whereas her serious delivery of the latter piece renders it less successful, "The Three Bares" succeeds because it deals with an essentially humourous situation: the explosion of an outhouse that leaves Grandpapa wondering, "WHAT THE HECK I ET" (*SSL* 68)? Instead of becoming enraged at the indignity he suffers, Grandpapa is pleased with the success of whatever has kept him "regular" this particular morning (*SSL* 68). He is relaxed, and does not dream that the match from his morning pipe hit the benzine Ma deposited in the outhouse the day before.

> . . . Squattin' in the duck-pond near,
> His silver whiskers singed away, a gosh-almighty wreck,
> Wi' half a yard o' toilet seat entwined about his neck,

he is proud of, not annoyed at, his situation (*SSL* 68). In contrast, Parry deems McClatchy's decision to set "The Spell of the Yukon" to music infelicitous because the poem lacks the qualities that appeal to contemporary audiences. McClatchy admits as much in confessing that she "edited out some verses or parts of such to shorten things . . . todays [*sic*] audiences have shorter attention spans [than Service's]." Furthermore, her delivery of the piece is flat and uninspired. Parry's selections appeal to contemporary audiences because they are seldom over four minutes in length, and like McClatchy's successful setting of "The Three Bares," they highlight Service's humorous aspect.

The "big things, real things, live things" (*RRS* 59) that confront people in the North demand a sense of humour, but they also indicate the need for a relaxed approach to life, such as Grandpapa displays. His attitude expresses the freedom offered in "The Call of the Wild" and achieved by the men in "While the Bannock Bakes." Comically expressed, Grandpapa's regularity echoes the "custom" and "convention" challenged in "The Call of the Wild" (*SS* 27), but when the "big blow-out [he makes]" upsets his morning routine he greets the challenge enthusiastically (*SSL* 68). Like the men in "While the Bannock Bakes" who are oblivious of their former differences, Grandpapa forgives the cause of the disturbance with a charming benevolence. His attitude affords him fulfilment, the growth within "the bigness of the whole" that "The Call of the Wild" invites (*SS* 26). Unlike the earlier poem, however, "The Three Bares" advocates this attitude with a humour that continues to appeal to audiences because it centres on a more tangible experience.

Conclusion

Survival may be the typically Canadian adventure, but Service conceives of it differently from Atwood. For Atwood, Canadians possess, as evidenced in their literature, a fundamental distrust of their environment (Atwood 49). Service moves beyond distrust in his verse to embrace the potential of the North. *Dementia borealis* wins out, as it must, but Service's characters who survive do so because they learn to adapt. They accept the North for what it is, moving beyond their fear of the wilderness and ceasing to seriously reproach it for its shifting conditions. As a result, the characters become the heroes Canadians admire. Similarly, the characters in Service's later work express a hearty joy of life. The senior citizen prepares to sow his wild oats, while the soldier enjoys his cup of tea amid the shells of battle.

Even the soldiers who find it difficult to enjoy life continue to affirm its value. The Faceless Man in "*Les Grands Mutiles*" accepts his rumoured death for the benefit of his family. He rejoices that their belief in his death entails only a short period of grief rather than the infinite misery his grotesque disfigurement would cause, were it known (*BB* 218). Similarly, the central speaker in *Ballads of a Bohemian*, Stephen Poore, follows his account of the Faceless Man with his "L'Envoi" that affirms life despite a maimed existence. He is ambiguous about the outcome of the war, yet satisfied within himself:

> . . . how my heart's aglow!
> Though in my coat's an empty sleeve,
> Ah! Do not think I ever grieve
>
> . . . . . .
>
> [I'll] give my soul to sheer delight,
> Till joy is almost pain. (*BB* 219)

Poore refuses to be bitter concerning his personal losses in the war, and greets the future with the same determination that characterizes the sourdough who knows that "the Wild must win in the end," and yet returns to the North (*SS* 32).

Although Canadians themselves continue to resist the environment and fear its sudden changes, Service encourages a calm acceptance of life's ironies. Service's successful attempt to reach Dawson across the Continental Divide issued in the confident ballads in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*. Although the North remains a harsh, challenging region in the popular imagination, the *Rhymes* encourage one to boldly encounter the wilderness. As "The Spell of the Yukon" earlier notes in *Songs of a Sourdough*, the North twists those it accepts into its friends (22). This positive attitude rejects notions of victimization. Service's characters possess a confidence distinct from the weakness that Atwood perceives in Canadian literary attitudes towards the environment. The majority of writers, in this interpretation of Canadian literature, find the challenge nature presents problematic. Service, on the other hand, ultimately advocates a gleeful acceptance of the challenge.

The vigour that Service's verse inherited from Kipling supports the declarations of the sourdoughs in "The Spell of the Yukon" and "The Heart of the Sourdough," who vow to continue their struggle with the North. Even though the latter speaker confesses that "the Wild must win in the end" (*SS* 32), there is no irony in its victory. It is the natural and accepted outcome of the contest. Pious Pete quails at the North, but his partner Sam Noot survives because he accepts the challenge of the North. Though "a scurvy-degenerate wreck," Sam meekly agrees to convert when confronted by the demented, rifle-wielding Pete (*BC* 44). He chooses survival in the face of death, adapting to his circumstances rather than resisting them.

The negotiation of circumstances varies, and Service does not set forth a single, uniform approach. What Canadians recognize as their own, however, is a response that confidently sets aside fear and doubt. The purposeful quality in Service's verse that early reviewers praised is the independent attitude it reflects through "direct," "striking and forceful language" (Hal 11). Whereas a mindless, foolhardy disregard naturally results in failure, as Constable Clancy's contraction of *dementia borealis* indicates, a healthy

disregard of difficulties characterizes the successful, purposeful individual. Tea distracts the soldier's attention from battle, the momentary scorn of death "[bucking him] up like anythink." After all, "fightin' [and therefore death] mustn't interfere with Tea" (*RRCM* 126-27). Madness culls those unsuited, and empowers those prepared, to unconditionally accept the possibilities of life. Although Sam McGee is no lover of the North, he confronts it and remains in the region, albeit against his will, as though held by "a spell" (*SS* 55). He is not suited to live in the North, but his posthumous triumph secures his own bliss because he confesses his weakness. He remains in the North, but is not of it. His confession of weakness prevents the fanatical observation of duty that vexes Constable Clancy. Unlike McGee, Clancy refuses to recognize his weakness. He insists on being of the North, and the region forces him to live with the damage he incurs as a reminder of humility.

In its entirety, the verse of Robert Service encourages survival, not from behind defences, or from a position of weakness, but with integrity. The spirit that informed his northern ballads continues through his depictions of France and Europe. An honest recognition of circumstances that assesses the dangers and then provides a vigorous response, is the model that his verse provides. The circumstances will call the bluff of those who refuse to recognize their situation, destroying them like Pious Pete, who could not see the northern lights for the light of the gospel he preached. For Canada, the vast tracts of wilderness allow the challenge of the northland to be, if not omnipresent, at least a dominant factor in Canadian society. The hinterland demands a recognition that characterizes us for ourselves and others as a nation that finds fulfilment in the daily battle with the "big things, real things, live things" of contemporary existence (*RRS* 59). Service chose to represent the Canadian situation through his vision of the struggle against the northern environment at a specific time in history. Yet the intense international interest that the struggle with the North continues to generate reveals that the spirit informing his verse is a continuing factor in contemporary Canadian life. It exists in the permanent

appeal of verse that reminds one of "human smallness" through an "enormous humour" (Tuleja xvii). Life involves conflicts, struggles, and disappointments; the Canadian environment impresses that on its inhabitants more constantly perhaps than that of any other developed nation. Yet when dementia begins to set in, Service's verse reminds his audience to relax and accept circumstances as they are. Have a pot of tea, or revel in "the bigness of the whole" that draws one beyond particularities to "the stillness that fills [one] with peace" (*SS* 26, 24).

Notes

[1] Laurence Karp discusses the similarity between "The Ballad of Fisher's Boarding House" and "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" in "Writing of *Dan McGrew*." *North* 21.5 (Sept.-Oct. 1974): 32-34.

[2] In addition to David Parry, who reminded me of the similarity between Service and the Australian bush poets, [Stompin'] Tom Connors comments that a ballad such as "The Cremation of Sam McGee" is "a great story" that warrants retelling in song for the benefit of those who will not or cannot read (Connors, Letter).

[3] Following a posting I made to the FOLKLORE listserv concerning this thesis and my use of the term *dementia borealis*, Lynn Noel of the Institute on Canada and the U. S., and the Institute on Arctic Studies at Dartmouth College replied, "Dementia borealis? Oh, we know it well. We all suffer from it down here -- that's why we keep going back" (26 May 1994). Curiously, the prevalence of blackflies and mosquitoes in summer -- a scourge of Service, among others (*PM* 321) -- does not attract the same attention as the cold of winter.

[4] In an earlier version of the ballad published in the Dawson *Daily News*, 14 June 1909, Service set the temperature at "eighty-five below" (2).

[5] Punctuation in the first stanza is from the text issued with the recording. The text in the liner notes also varies in omitting "and" from the fifth line of the first stanza, and correcting the spelling of "To" in the seventh line of the third stanza to read "Too." Rogers omits "and" on the recording.

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